NOVEMBER 1st ISSUE, 1927
VOL. LXIV No. 4

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

November 1st

Adventure

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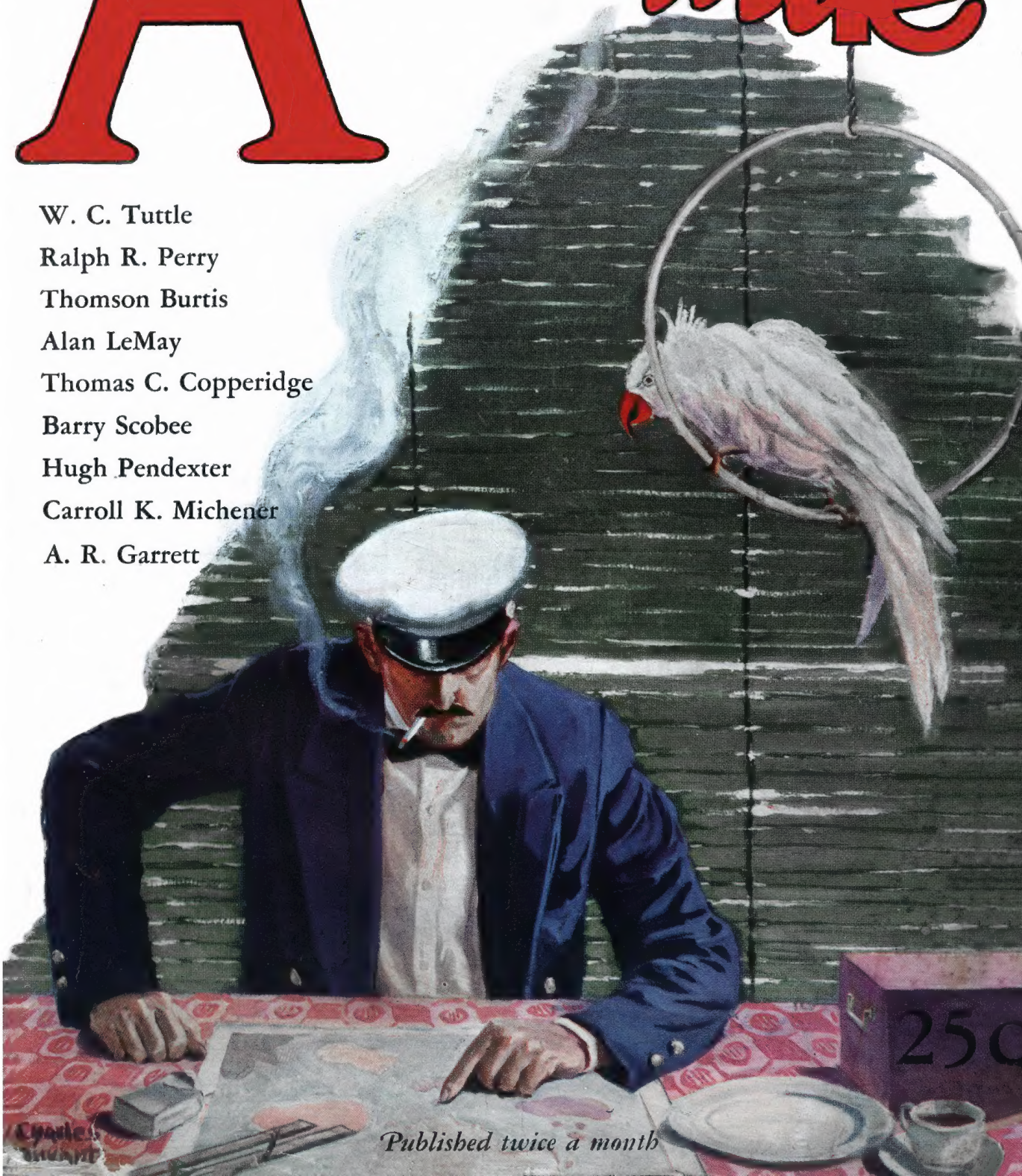

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"*Malédiction!*" cried the captain, and fell back on the bench.

She fainted. As her eyes closed, as all consciousness left her, she thought she felt a firey touch upon her lips, a kiss more burning than an executioner's branding-iron.

When she recovered she was surrounded by soldiers of the watch who were carrying off the captain; the priest had disappeared; the window at the back of the room, looking up the river, was wide open; they picked up the priest's cloak, which they supposed belonged to the officer, and she heard them saying:

"'Tis a sorceress who has stabbed a captain."

In Victor Hugo's famous novel, *Notre Dame of Paris*, the priest, Claude Frollo, archdeacon, alchemist, almost magician, had seen Esmeralda, a beautiful gypsy girl, dancing in the street and had fallen violently in love with her. Yielding to the sudden temptation he has her carried off that night, but the girl is rescued by the gay De Châteaupers, captain of the king's archers. With him she naturally falls in love; surprised in their nocturnal assignation by Frollo, the captain is poniarded by the priest and Esmeralda arrested and put to torture for his murder, although he survives the wound. She is rescued by her grateful slave Quasimodo, the hunchback bell-ringer of the cathedral, and hidden in one of the towers. Hugo's account of Quasimodo's vengeance against Frollo is one of the most thrilling in all literature. MOST TRANSLATIONS AND THE FILMS GIVE ONLY A GARBLED VERSION OF THE STORY.

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In *The Toilers of the Sea* Gilliat, loving Déruchette, undertakes a herculean task, and, in spite of a struggle with a devil-fish and other obstacles, succeeds. In *The Laughing Man* a disfigured youth, lost son of a peer who loves the beautiful but blind Dea, finds himself furiously loved by a duchess—one of Hugo's most remarkable creations "a virgin Messalina," who offers herself to him.

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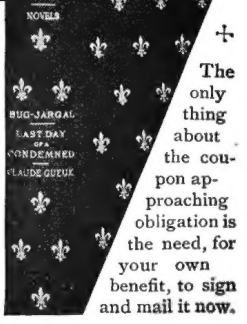

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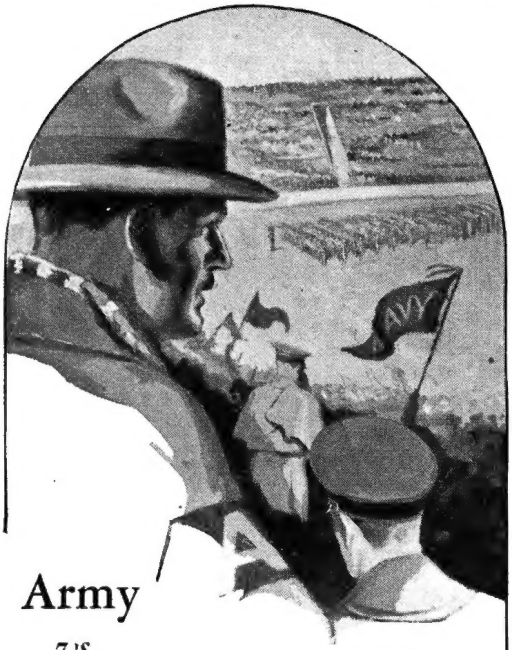

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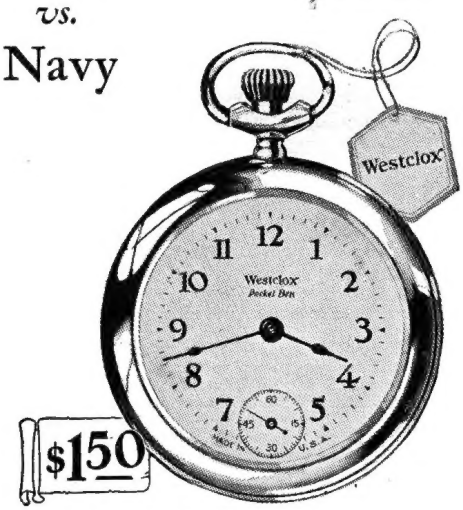

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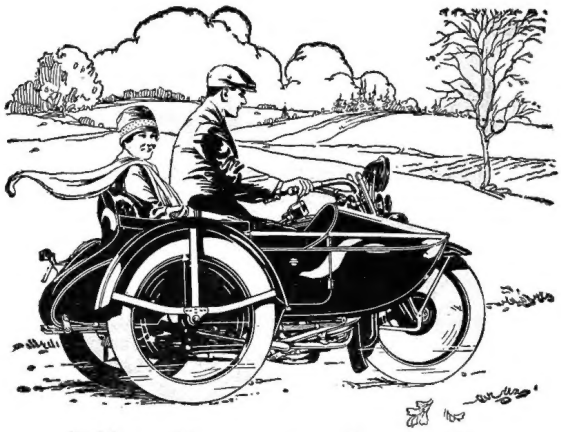

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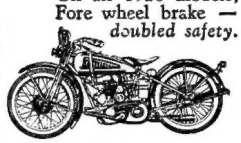

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ADVENTURE
Nov. 1st, 1927

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Volume 64
Number 4

The Day-Dreamer

Will he ever wake up?

HIS life is made up of rosy visions.

He sees himself in a manager's office—as the president of a firm—with a $20,000 salary—perhaps even as a millionaire with a Rolls Royce, a rakish yacht and a swell country estate.

But all this grandeur is in his day dreams. He lives in the golden **PARADISE OF TOMORROW**—and it never comes.

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What he needs is a **STICK OF DYNAMITE**—anything to wake him up and teach him to get results from his abilities **NOW.**

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He will always be somebody else's servant, instead of master of his own destiny.

How does he get into such a mental state? Because he uses only about **ONE-TENTH** of his mental energies in doing the vital things that count. Psychologists have proved that most of us use **NINE-TENTHS** of our brain power in day-dreaming, fortune-wishing, aimless time-killing. We are nearly all victims of the vicious habit of living far below our God-given endowments!

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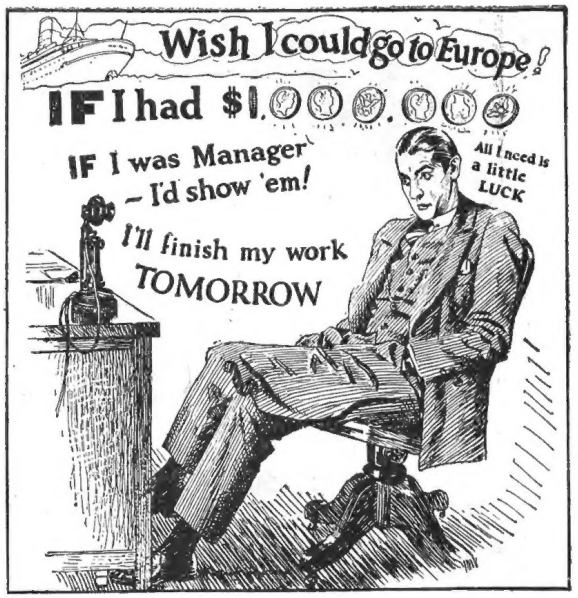

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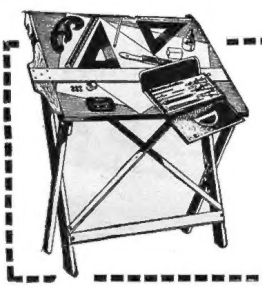

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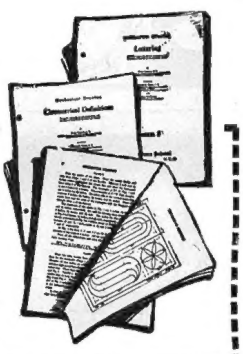

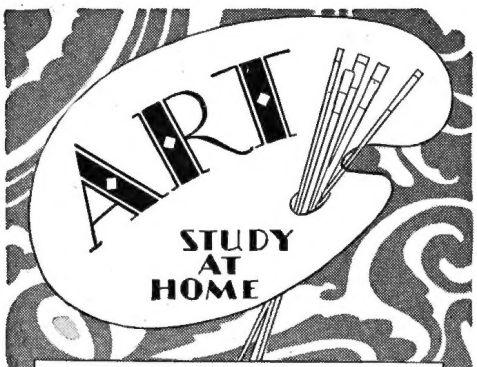

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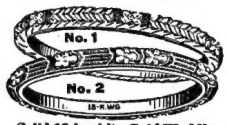

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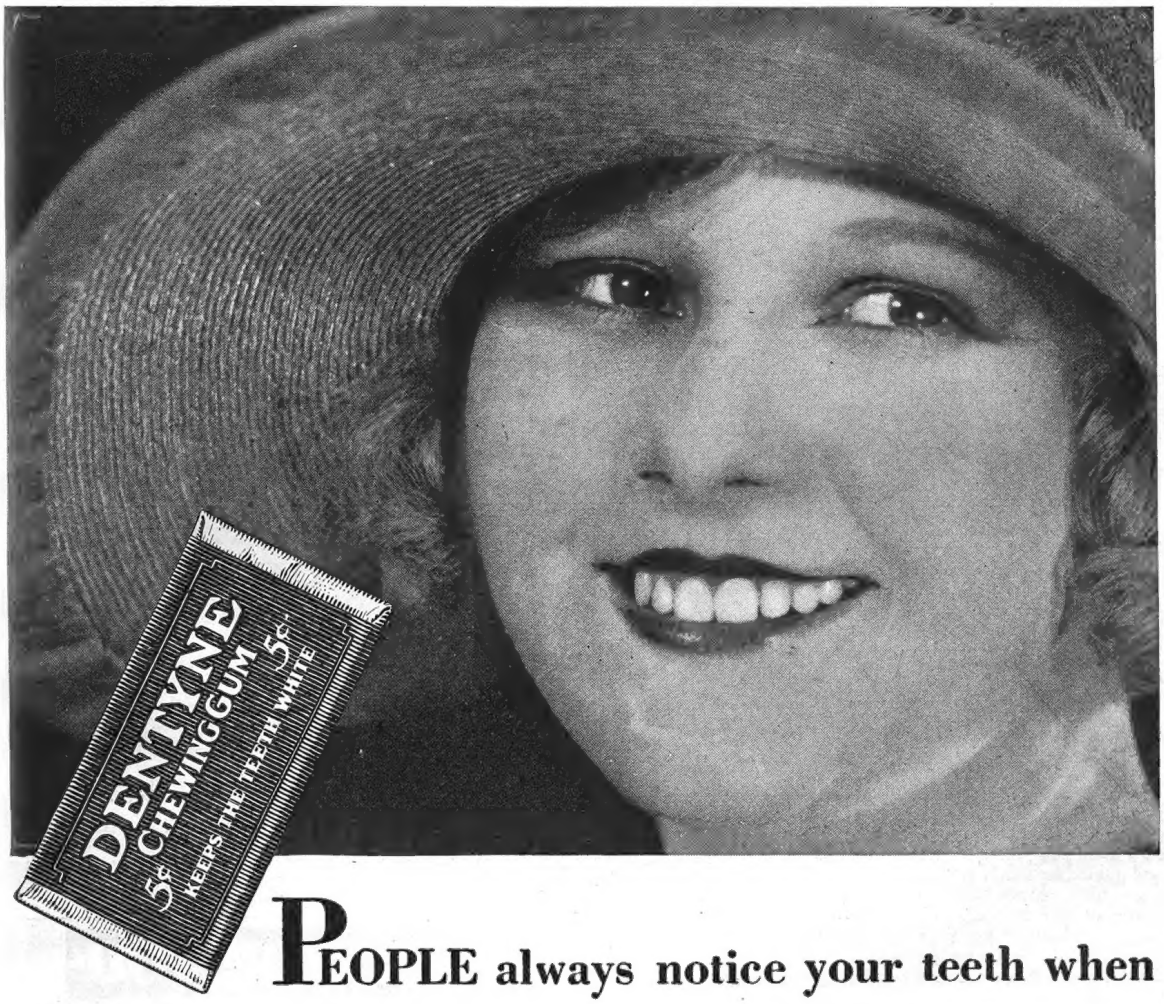

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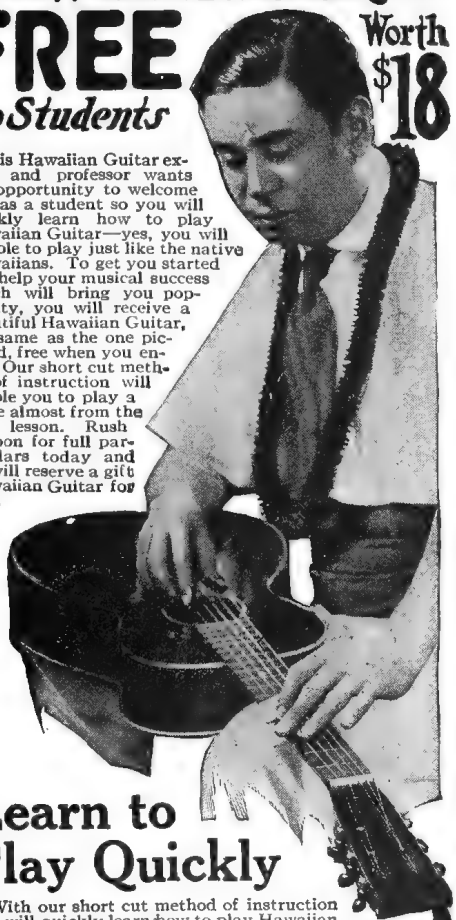

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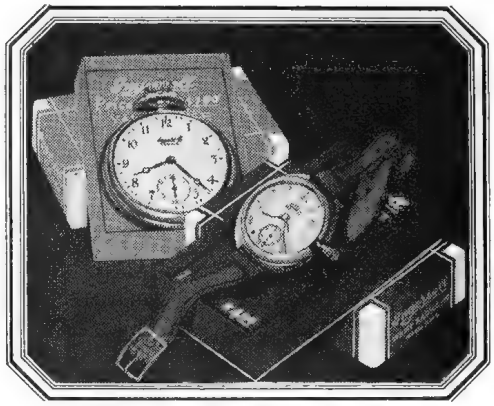

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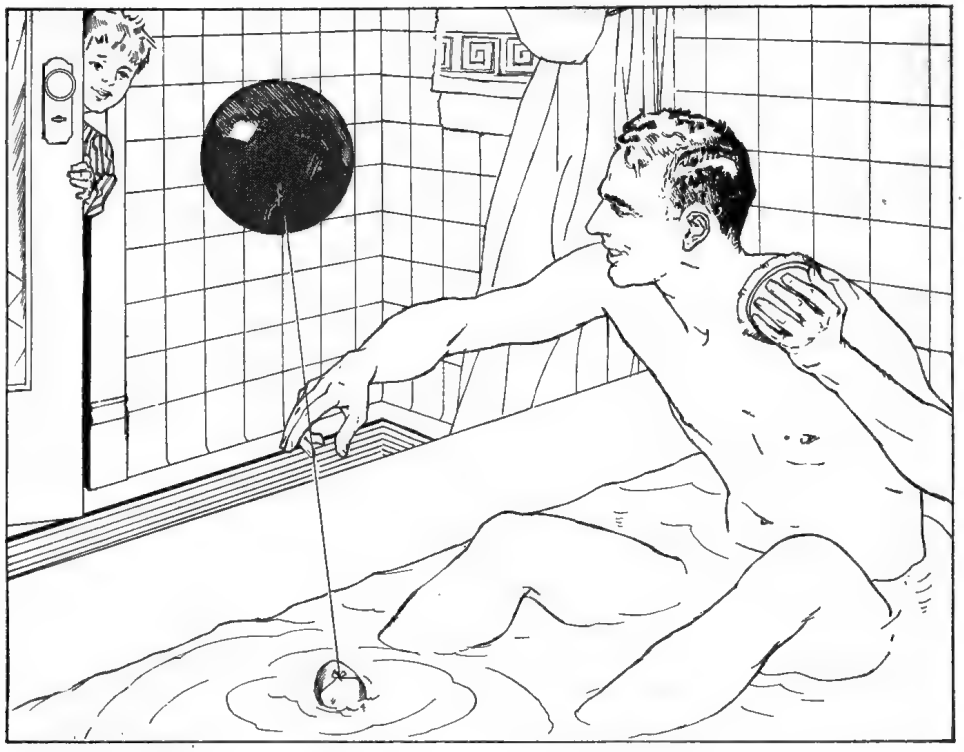

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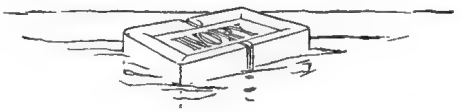

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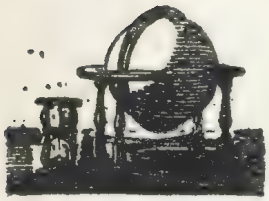

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

Contents for November 1st

Shotgun Gold . . . . . W. C. Tuttle 2
A Complete Novel of Hashknife and Sleepy

The Million-Dollar Boots . . . . . Ralph R. Perry 74
A Story of the Sea

The Dubasher . . . . . Captain Mansfield 83

At Lasker's Landing . . . . . Hugh Pendexter 84
A Story of Civil War Spies

The Hand Is Quicker . . . . . Barry Scobee 94
A Story of an Almost Perfect Crime

A Raid on the American Coast . . Leonard H. Nason 111

The Blue Cord . . . . . Thomas C. Copperidge 112
A Story of a Philippine Army Cantonment

Old Father of Waters . . . . . Alan LeMay 124
Conclusion of a Five-Part Story of Mississippi Steamboat Days

November . . . . . A. R. Garrett 143
A Story of the Timber Country

The Purple Monkey . . . . . Carroll K. Michener 151
A Story of China

Arizony . . . . . C. E. Kilbourne 159

Salute . . . . . Thomson Burtis 160
A Complete Novelette of the Border Air Patrol

The Camp-Fire 182

Ask Adventure 188

Trail Ahead 192

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A New Hashknife and Sleepy Story

SHOTGUN GOLD

BY

W. C. Tuttle

"AND that's how it comes that I'm sheriff of Black Horse—and may I be hung with horseshoes and rabbit-feet, et cettery."

Roaring Rigby tilted back in an old swivel chair and looked disconsolately at the white-haired man who sat across the battered desk. The man had a long, deeply lined face, slightly reddish nose, somber blue eyes beneath white eyebrows.

Roaring Rigby himself was long, lean, bony of face and figure, with the pouched eyes of a bloodhound. His nose was long too, and slightly out of line; his cheek-bones were almost visible through the tightly stretched skin that covered them. His ears were of the flaring variety, and his neutral-colored hair was thin, like fox-tail grass on alkali flats.

The room in which these two men sat was the sheriff's office in the town of Turquoise, the county-seat of Black Horse County. It was a small room, unpapered, except for an array of reward notices, a State map and a calendar of the previous year. A desk, several chairs and a gun-cabinet completed the furnishings. The floor was uncarpeted and had been scored deeply by years of high heel scraping.

Roaring Rigby lifted his feet and rasped one spurred heel across the top of the desk, as if to express his contempt for such a piece of furniture.

"And so Jim Randall, sheriff of this county, went away, did he?" sighed the old man.

"He did that."

Roaring Rigby turned his sad-dog eyes upon the old man.

"Yea-a-ah, he went away, Jim Randall did. He wrote out his resignation, packed up his fambly, folded his tent, as you might say, and silently stole away. But I don't blame him, Judge. He's a married man. You're as much to blame as he is.

You two opined to make Turquoise sanitary. You ought to know better, Judge; you're an old-timer. Jim Randall was born and raised in a cow-town, and he knew better. 'Sall right to set down upon crime. Oh, I ain't sayin' your motives ain't right. Turquoise needs cleanin'. English Ed's honkatonk ain't noways a Sunday School, and that redlight district hadn't ought to be there, but—"

"I know," nodded Judge Beal.

"Yea-a-ah, you know now. You should have knowed before. Jim Randall got his warnin' twice. They told him he'd get the third one in the dark, and Jim always was scared of the dark. You've got your first one, Judge."

"Turquoise isn't fit for a decent woman. Why, a—"

"It was before you two started yore crew—crew—"

"Crusade, Roaring."

"Yeah, that's it. You posted your notices, and you didn't have nothin' to back 'em. Jim Randall posts his notice, demandin' that every puncher bring his gun to the sheriff's office when he got to town, or get arrested. Did they, I ask you, Judge? They did like hell! You told 'em in plain English that the honkatonk must go. Did it?"

"No," said the judge sadly. "I am obliged to admit that it is still there. I heard that Jim Randall had resigned, so I came to you, Roaring; you will be appointed sheriff, because you were Jim's deputy. Now, what are you going to do?"

"Me, huh?" Roaring savagely rasped his spurred heel half-way across the desk top.

"I'm goin' to try and hold the job, Judge."

"Meaning that you are not in sympathy with my campaign?"

"Meanin' that I'm in sympathy with my own skin. Your campaign! Judge, if you'll take my friendly advice, you'll foller Jim Randall. The road is plenty wide. Why, doggone you, Judge, nobody takes you seriously. You drink more liquor than any single drinker in this town."

"Granted."

"And you're single."

"Fortunately."

"There you are, Judge. You want to clean up the town. Do you love the morals of your feller-men so much that you'd take a chance on gettin' shot? You've got no wife to be offended by the honkatonk girls, and it's a cinch you ain't temperate. Go back and set on your bench, Judge. Cleanin' up Turquoise ain't no single-handed job."

"They'll not run me out."

"Mm-m-m-m-m-mebby not, Judge. Damn it, I'm not any more stuck on things than you are! I don't like hornets, but I don't poke their nests."

"In other words, you are not going to enforce Randall's notices regarding carrying arms in town?"

"Well, I'm no fool, if that's what you mean, Judge."

The old judge nodded sadly. His was a forlorn cause, the cleaning up of Turquoise City. The sheriff, backed by a county judge, had made a half-hearted attempt to change conditions; but he had been virtually run out of town. He had resigned, taken his family and moved away, fearful of what might happen to him.

The old judge was sincere, drunkenly so most of the time, although in a dignified manner. That is, he was drunkenly dignified. Judge Beal had come of a good family and was well educated. He might have gone far in his chosen profession, except for his love of liquor; he had drifted into Turquoise City, when that place was

in the throes of a mining fever, so he hung out his shingle and became the lawyer of Turquoise.

That was twenty years ago. His old shingle still hung outside of his office, but the lettering had long since faded. For five of those years he had been the county judge. He had seen Turquoise City in boom days, when men scrambled for raw gold; he had seen it gradually change after the days of the big strikes to a commonplace cow-town. When the railroad came along it boomed again, in a way. The railroad made it the shipping point of the valley, the logical shopping city for the surrounding range and for the mining district northeast of Turquoise. It was a busy county seat.

It had also become the gambling center of the country—the flesh-pot of the cowmen and miners. Turquoise City was unmoral rather than immoral. It was a wide-open town; business was good. Even if painted women did flaunt themselves on the streets, and an occasional cowpuncher decided to make the main street a bucking-chute, or shot at some one's sign, it did not seem to hurt business. Many liked the wild excitement.

But to Judge Beal it was an offense to decent folks. He had persuaded Jim Randall, the sheriff, that something must be done, and they had started a two-handed crusade, which was doomed to fail, for Turquoise City did not want reform.

Jim Randall had received two warnings. The second one said:

There will be one more but you won't see it, because it will come out of the dark.

No name had been signed. The old judge had received one that read the same as the first one Randall had received.

The road is open. This is your first warning.

It was evident that the gambling element of Turquoise City did not desire the continued presence of Judge Beal, although he had accomplished nothing against it.

He left the sheriff's office and crossed the street to the front of the Black Horse Saloon, gambling-house and honkatonk, the largest building in Turquoise City. It was a huge, barn-like structure, not at all ornamental.

English Ed Holmes owned the place. He was an immaculate, cold-blooded gambler, a man of middle-age, and in a way very suave and handsome.

As the judge passed the Black Horse he met a cowboy, who flashed him a white-toothed smile. It was Pete Conley, a half-breed cowboy, whose father, old Moses Conley, owned the Double Circle C, known as the Hot Creek ranch. Pete was about twenty-five years of age, more Indian than white.

"Hello, Peter," said the judge kindly.

"Very good," smiled Pete. "How you, Judge?"

"Nicely, thank you, Peter. Folks all well?"

"Pretty good; I buy you drink, Judge."

The old judge shook his head.

"Thank you just the same, Peter."

He passed on down the street, turned through an alley and walked slowly out to his home. It was a little frame building, rather dilapidated, with an old picket-fence around part of it.

The old judge was a bachelor, but he afforded a cook, in the person of an old Chinese, who was crippled with rheumatism. The cook met him at the door and waited until the judge hung up his broad-brimmed hat and removed his soiled white collar.

"I flind him unda doo'," said the Chinese, producing a sealed envelope, unmarked except by contact of soiled hands.

The old judge's lips compressed firmly as he examined the envelope.

"Somebody leabe him," said the Chinese.

"Undoubtedly," replied the judge evenly.

He knew what it contained. The other envelope had been the same. After a few moments of indecision he tore open the envelope and quickly scanned the single sheet of paper it contained.

There will be one more but you won't see it. Go! ! !

Slowly he tore the envelope and paper to bits, his old face grim with determination. He walked to the door and threw the papers outside, while he looked casually up and down the street.

The Chinese watched him curiously, but the old judge made no comment as he slowly removed his boots and put on an old pair of carpet-slippers. Then he went to an old chest of drawers, from which he took a heavy Colt gun, carrying it over to the table, where he placed it beside a book. The Chinese turned and walked back to the kitchen.

"You didn't see anybody around here, did you?" asked the old judge.

The Chinese stopped and looked back toward the door.

"I no see," he said blankly.

"All right."

The judge sat down, sighed deeply and picked up his book.

THE HOT CREEK ranch was rather a bone of contention in the Black Horse country. In the days before the cattle business had grown to mean much, Moses Conley had homesteaded his legal amount of land and bought enough to make five hundred acres, in the center of which he had built his ranch-houses. Within this five hundred acres was Hot Spring Valley, a deep swale, protected from the north by a pile of old lava beds, and fairly well bordered on the other sides by cottonwood and live oaks.

In the bottom of this swale were warm springs, that never froze, even in the bitter winters, and they kept the temperature much above the average. The surrounding lava beds and trees broke the force of the north winds, and the little valley was of sufficient size for many cattle to find refuge from blizzard and heavy snow.

Moses Conley looked much like the usual conception of his Biblical namesake. He was a huge man, white-haired, white-bearded, with a stern cast of countenance. In his youth he had married a Nez Perce squaw named Minnie, who was still his wife. There were two children, Pete and Dawn. Dawn was twenty, a tall, lithe girl, more white than Indian, and the prettiest girl in the valley.

Old Moses Conley's life had been one of strife. His ranch was midway between Turquoise City and the Big 4 ranch, the biggest cow outfit in the valley. Time after time the Big 4 had tried to buy out Moses Conley; but the old man had refused all of their offers.

He hated Franklyn Moran, who owned the Big 4 and lived in ease and luxury in Chicago. Men said that that was why Moses Conley refused to sell out to the Big 4. There was a story told about some trouble between Conley and Moran in the old mining days; Moran was alleged to have cheated Conley out of a piece of property.

The truth of the matter was that Moran had money, and by offering a bigger price than Conley could pay he had acquired the property after Conley had offered to take Moran in with him on the deal.

The Big 4 had made life rather hard for Conley, and he had retaliated by fencing in his five hundred acres with four strands of barbed-wire, almost impoverishing himself to buy the material to shut out the Big 4 cattle from Hot Spring Valley, or Hot Creek, as it was commonly known.

Moran had sent Conley a final offer of more than the ranch was worth; but the squaw-man refused flatly to consider any offer. He would keep his ranch; it was home to him, and a home meant more than money.

Moran had one son, Jimmy, who came from college to show the Big 4 how it should be run; but he got into trouble with "Slim" Regan, the foreman, and tried by telegraph to have the whole outfit fired. Failing in that, he drew every cent he had on deposit in a Chicago bank, his inheritance from his mother, who had died two years before he came to Black Horse Valley. He bought out the Stumbling K ranch, two miles east of Conley's ranch; it was known as the Busted ranch, because every owner had gone broke.

Jimmy Moran was going to show the world how to raise cows. He hired "Wind

River" Jim, who had no other name, as far as he knew, and "Lovely" Lucas, who had been christened Ephriam, to punch cows for him, and "Horse-Collar" Fields to do the cooking.

Jimmy was of medium height, sandy-haired, freckled, with a streak of good and a streak of mean. He liked liquor and cards and was not averse to fighting occasionally. In fact Jimmy liked cards so well that everybody predicted no change in the name or fortunes of the Busted ranch. But their opinions meant little to Jimmy, as he went his joyful way, regardless of anything.

He had met and liked Dawn Conley, and he had also met Moses Conley, who told him to keep away from the Hot Creek ranch.

"He's afraid I'm after his daughter," said Jimmy, but he knew the real reason was because of the enmity Conley held against his father.

Pete Conley had always treated Jimmy civilly. But Pete was more like old Conley's wife—nearly all Indian. Dawn did not look or act like an Indian.

APPARENTLY there was no law against selling liquor to a half-breed in Turquoise City, and Pete was a regular customer of the Black Horse Saloon and of the gambling tables. More often than not, he quit a winner. It may have been his proverbial luck and his rather insolent smile that caused Joe Mallette, one of English Ed's gamblers, to dislike him.

They had clashed several times, and Mallette had asked English Ed to bar the half-breed from the place; but the owner of the saloon refused. Mallette was a big man, with the cold, hard eyes of a professional gambler and the chin of a fighter. He hated to see Pete Conley buy chips in his game, and he did not conceal his dislike of the half-breed.

It was after dark that night when Pete took a chair in Mallette's stud-poker game. It was not Mallette's shift, but the other dealer had not put in an appearance. Mallette treated Pete civilly, for once; perhaps he thought that the other dealer would show up presently. Mallette had been drinking rather heavily and was just a bit clumsy in stacking up Pete's chips. Jimmy Moran was in the game, loser, as usual, but still smiling.

"I heard that Jim Randall pulled out," said one of the players casually.

"Time he did," growled Mallette, shoving the chips over to the young half-breed.

"Randall damn good man," said Pete slowly.

Mallette was too diplomatic to start an argument, so he said nothing. He played a close game, which was the natural thing for the dealer to do. He knew that Pete Conley had very little money, so he waited for a chance to break him; but the half-breed knew how Mallette played his cards. Pete was lucky, and his stacks of red and blue chips increased rapidly.

It was about nine o'clock, and the other dealer had come in, but Mallette was in a pot which he had opened. He was playing very coldly and had opened the pot for a substantial bet, thinking that the others would drop out; but Pete had raised him heavily. Jimmy Moran, sitting at Pete's left, had turned his cards in such a way that Pete got a flash of the king of hearts.

But it made no difference in the play, because Jimmy passed the opening bet and threw his hand in the discards. Mallette was dealing. After deliberating heavily, Mallette called Pete's raise. Pete drew one card, which he seemed to ignore; Mallette drew two. He dropped his cards one-handed from the top of the deck, and one of them skidded on top of some of the discards.

At the same time, Mallette upset a stack of chips in front of him and straightened them up carefully. He looked at his cards and checked the bet. Pete studied Mallette's face. Pete had four sevens in his hand. The best Mallette could have had before the draw would have been three of a kind, and with threes he would have drawn only one card, masking the fact of his having threes. Or perhaps he had only one pair of jacks or better to open on, and had held up another card as

a "kicker." Pete felt safe. After a moment of deliberation he shoved all of his chips to the center. There was possibly two hundred dollars' worth of chips.

"That's all I got," said Pete slowly. "I bet that."

Mallette turned the edges of his cards slightly, a half-sneer on his lips, as he shoved out enough chips to cover the bet. Pete grinned, as he spread out the four sevens; but his grin faded when Mallette showed four kings and began raking in the pot.

Mallette nodded to the other dealer and started to slide his chair back from the table. Pete's eyes were upon him; his lips twisted queerly.

"You—you thief!" choked the half-breed.

He jerked to his feet, reaching back for his gun. Jimmy Moran flung himself against Pete, blocking his draw, while another player twisted Pete's gun from his hand. Mallette straightened up, his lips white.

"What's that?" he snapped. "Who's a thief?"

"You are!" rasped the enraged Pete. "Leave it to Jimmy Moran. He had that king of hearts in his hand. It was a dead card. You stole it, you thief!"

Mallette's eyes shifted to Jimmy Moran, who was looking at him, his mouth half-open.

"By golly, I can't remember," said Jimmy. "Seems to me—no, I can't say."

"I reckon you can't," said Mallette dryly.

He turned and started toward the bar, when Pete tore away from Jimmy and started for Mallette.

"Give back that money!" demanded Pete. "You stole—"

Mallette whirled and met Pete, smashing him full in the face with a powerful right-hand swing. It knocked Pete flat on his back, almost under the feet of the men who come to see what it was all about. Mallette turned away and went out through the rear of the building.

Pete sat up, wiping the blood from his lips, looking around in a dazed way. English Ed shoved his way to Pete. He had heard what it was all about.

"Get up!" he exclaimed. "Pick up your hat and get out of here, you damned half-breed, and stay out! Don't never come in here again."

"Wait just a minute," said Jimmy Moran.

He had secured Pete's six-shooter and now he handed it to Pete.

"Wait for what?" asked English Ed.

"The trouble was caused by Mallette havin' too many kings," said Jimmy slowly. "I think I remember the king of hearts bein' in my hand."

"I see it," nodded Pete. "When you lay hand down, I see it."

"I don't believe a word of it!" said English Ed.

Whap!

Jimmy Moran struck English Ed across the face with an open hand, and the sound of it could have been heard across the street. It caused the gambler to half-turn on his heels; and before he could recover his balance Jimmy swung a hard right fist against English Ed's jaw, knocking him backward into the deserted poker table, where he went down in a sitting position, his eyes set in a silly stare.

The room was in an uproar. A woman screamed, another laughed. Jimmy grinned widely and nudged Pete with his elbow.

"Better get out, Pete," he said. "If ye want Mallette, he'll be spendin' your money for dollar bottles of beer in one of our houses of ill fame."

Pete wiped the back of his hand across his bleeding lips and headed for the back door, still carrying the gun in his hand. No one made any attempt to molest him. Jimmy Moran backed against the wall and watched English Ed regain his senses.

The big gambler was punch-drunk. He slowly got to his feet, tried to smile, but merely grimaced. A gambler came with a wet towel; but he motioned it aside and went to the bar. Some of the men followed him. The gambler with the towel came in closer to Jimmy.

"Mallette was drunk," he said, as if

excusing him for what he had done. "All day he's been drinking absinth with his whisky. Maybe he didn't know what he was doing."

"Yeah, I know," said Jimmy. "He was dead drunk. My, my, he was so drunk he could steal a card and none of us seen him. Drunk, hell! What're you tryin' to do, protect him?"

"Oh, no, I just thought—do you suppose the half-breed will try to get him?"

"Are you tryin' get a statement from me?" demanded Jimmy. "English got what was comin' to him. He backed a thief."

"I wouldn't say that to Mallette, if I was you, Moran."

"A-a-a-aw, go wrap that rag around your head! If English Ed is goin' to run a den of thieves, he can expect what a thief must expect. If Mallette had done that to me, he'd be in hell right now, ridin' on the hot end of a bullet! It was me that cramped the half-breed, and I'm sorry I did."

Jimmy jerked his hat down over his eyes and strode through the room, going straight past the bar, where English Ed and a crowd of men were having a drink. The big gambler knew now what it was all about and he turned his head to watch Jimmy leave the place.

"He got you when you wasn't lookin'," said a man.

English Ed nodded slowly.

"Did Mallette steal that card?" he asked.

One of the men from the poker game was at the bar, and it was to him that English directed the question.

"I don't know," said the man truthfully. "I wasn't in the pot, so I didn't pay any attention."

"Mallette is getting clumsy," said English slowly.

"It's a wonder he can keep his feet," said the bartender. "He's full of absinth and whisky. He won't know what it's all about tomorrow."

"How much did he win from the breed?"

"About two hundred dollars," said the dealer who was to take Mallette's place. "Goin' to give it back?"

"Not unless I get more proof than I've got. Don't let that half-breed ever come in here again. He's all through."

"How about Moran?"

"I'll handle Moran myself."

"Somebody ought to find Mallette and tell him to look out for Conley," said the gambler. "That breed will kill him, if he gets a chance—and he's huntin' him now."

A man came through the room and shoved his way up to the bar beside English Ed.

"The sheriff ain't in here, is he?" he asked nervously.

"What do you want him for?" asked English.

"Found a dead man. He's between here and the north end of the redlight district. It's Mallette, the gambler."

"Mallette!" English grasped the man by the arm. "When did you find him?"

"Who the hell do you think you're pinchin'?" demanded the man, yanking his arm away. "I just found him. I was comin' alone and almost fell over him. Oh, he's dead all right."

The man had spoken loud enough for every one to hear, and there was a general exodus to view the body. A lantern was secured, and the crowd went through the rear entrance. It was about four hundred feet from the rear of the saloon to the line of buildings that comprised the redlight district of Turquoise City.

The last house of this row, on the north end, was possibly two hundred yards from the rear of the saloon; and between that building and the Turquoise Hotel, which fronted on the main street, was Judge Beal's little house.

The crowd went past the rear of his building and found the body of Mallette. He had been shot squarely between the eyes. Indifferent to the fact that the sheriff and coroner might care to view the remains as found, they picked up the body and carried it back to the Black Horse Saloon and placed it on a cot in a rear room.

SOME one found Roaring Rigby in a restaurant and told him what had happened. He left his meal and hurried to the saloon, shouldering his way into the little room. Rigby was mad; he knew his rights. He turned on English Ed, who leaned against the wall, his face a trifle more white than usual.

"Who the hell brought that body here?" demanded Roaring.

"We did," said English. "There was a crowd of us."

"You did, eh?" Roaring hooked his thumbs over his belt and glared at the gambler. "A crowd of you, eh? Tromped all over everythin', eh? Picked him right up. Hell, a sheriff has a fat chance of findin' out anythin'. Don'tcha suppose I'd like to have seen him where he laid?"

"What's the use?" said English Ed coldly. "That half-breed Conley went out to get him."

Roaring Rigby squinted closely at English Ed for a moment before turning to the crowd.

"Git out of here," he ordered. "No, you stay here, Ed."

He moved them all out, closed the door tightly and turned to the gambler.

"What about Pete Conley?"

In a few words the gambler told him about the trouble, but made no mention of his trouble with Jimmy Moran. Roaring listened closely.

"Did Mallette steal that card, English?" he asked.

The gambler shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't see the play. Jimmy Moran saw the play, but wasn't sure. He was the one who was supposed to have discarded that king of hearts. Mallette was drinking and—"

"Had a right to steal a card, I suppose."

"I didn't say that!"

"You meant it. Did Mallette carry a gun?"

"I've never seen him with one. He had none on him when we found him. Conley murdered him."

Roaring Rigby took a deep breath, rather a jerky one.

"Murder? Yeah, I reckon that's right," softly.

"The damn half-breed!" exclaimed English Ed under his breath.

"Blood don't make no difference," said Roaring quickly. "The law don't draw no color line, English."

"The law be damned! Mallette was murdered. Mallette was a gambler—one of my men. Judge Beal would turn Conley loose. He'd never hang a man for killing a gambler."

"Old Judge Beal is a square-shooter, English. Nobody can say he ain't honest. But he ain't hangin' nobody unless they need it."

"Well, he better keep his nose out of my business."

"Yeah, I s'pose. You better send somebody for a doctor. Old Doc Shelley is the coroner; so you better get him, not that he can do Mallette any good, but to make it legal."

They opened the door and walked out into the saloon. Business was at a standstill. A knot of girls stood near the honk-atonk platform, talking in subdued voices, and a crowd of cowboys and gamblers were at the bar. For once, the *whirr* of the roulette-wheel and the clatter of chips were stilled.

Roaring Rigby walked past the long bar, and a cowboy called to him:

"If you want to save that half-breed for trial, you better start travelin', Rigby."

It was Mark Clayton, of the Big 4 outfit. Roaring turned and looked at Clayton.

"And you better sober up and go home." said Roaring. "This is a man's job—and you ain't dry behind the ears."

Roaring walked straight across the street to a general store. He knew the crowd in the Black Horse would watch to see what he would do. Straight through the store he went, opened a back door and headed around to his stable, which was behind the sheriff's office.

He knew the crowd in the saloon was planning either to go out to the Hot Creek ranch after Pete Conley, or to take Pete away from him when he brought him

to jail. Roaring saddled his sorrel gelding, circled the town and headed for the Conley ranch, riding swiftly.

JIMMY MORAN rode away from Turquoise City, a grin on his lips. His right hand ached a little, but he minded it not. He could still see the vacant stare in English Ed's eyes; he chuckled to himself. There had been a certain satisfaction in hitting the big gambler.

"Mebby I can save a little money, if I get in bad with all the gamblers and rum sellers," he told his horse.

He had championed the cause of the son of his father's ancient enemy, and he wondered what his father would say if he knew about it. He realized that he had put himself in bad with English Ed and his gang, which meant that he would be none too safe in Turquoise City.

He forded the river that ran near the Hot Creek ranch and traveled along Moses Conley's barbed-wire fence. About half-way along this side of the fence the road forked, turning to the left to Jimmy's ranch. Only a short distance beyond the forks was Conley's gate, where cottonwoods lined the road and grew along the fence.

As Jimmy turned into his road, he caught the flash of a white dress in the moonlight near the gate. He turned his horse back to the main road, and went slowly up to the gate. The wearer of the white dress was Dawn Conley. She was holding the reins of her horse and had swung the gate partly open.

"Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Dawn!"

"Hello, Jimmy," said the girl simply.

Jimmy dismounted and dropped his reins, knowing that the chunky bay would stand as long as the reins hung down. Jimmy went close to her, his hat in his hand.

"I was waiting for Dad," she said. "I —I thought it was him. He went over to the 7AL this afternoon."

The 7AL was located about five miles east of Turquoise City.

"I see," said Jimmy. "You—you don't think anythin' has happened to him, do you, Dawn?"

"Oh, no; but I—I—"

"Uh-huh."

Jimmy swallowed heavily; he shifted uneasily. He wanted to put out a hand and touch her. Whenever he saw her he forgot that she was part Indian and daughter of his father's enemy. Standing there in the moonlight, within half an arm's reach of her, Jimmy hooked his thumbs over his belt and stared at her face.

"Dawn," he said hoarsely, "Dawn, you're beautiful."

"Jimmy Moran, you—why say that?" She moved slightly away.

"Don't go away," he said slowly. "It's all right, Dawn; I had to say that. It ain't wrong to say what you think. No, I'm not drunk; I never was more sober in my life. I've never seen you in my life when I didn't think you was the most beautiful girl I ever seen."

"You mustn't say that, Jimmy."

"Why not? It may not mean anythin' to you, but it does to me. Standin' here like a danged idiot, tellin' you things like that is like drinkin' liquor. It kinda makes me dizzy. Funny, ain't it? I'm scared to tell you things like that, and still I'm doin' it. It's like doin' things when you're drunk—mebby you hadn't ought to, but you do it just the same."

"Well," said Dawn vaguely, "I don't know."

"You wouldn't," said Jimmy softly. "You've got to love to feel that way, Dawn."

"To love?"

"Yes, Dawn—I love you."

"You love me?" slowly.

Neither of them saw Roaring Rigby. He came riding up the dusty road, his horse still dripping from the water of the ford, his horse's hoofs muffled in the dust. But he saw them, and turned his horse into the shadow of the cottonwood. He dismounted and came ahead on foot, keeping close to the trees.

"I swear I love you, Dawn," said Jimmy. "I've never had a chance to tell

you before. Oh, I know our fathers hate each other; but what has that to do with us?"

"I'm Injun," she said.

"I'm Irish."

He did not try to go closer to her, and for a long time neither of them spoke. Then:

"I heard that you might marry Roarin' Rigby," said Jimmy. "They say he's been comin' out to see you, Dawn."

"He's a friend of Dad's."

"But comin' out to see you, Dawn."

"Perhaps; but he's too old, Jimmy. Dad likes him."

"Do you like him, Dawn?"

"He's a nice man, but he is so homely, Jimmy—and old. No, I never could marry him. He looks funny."

Jimmy was silent for several moments. A breeze rattled the dry leaves of the cottonwoods.

"Dawn, why were you anxious to meet your father?"

"It was Peter," she said anxiously. "He came home awhile ago. He had been fighting, Jimmy. His lips are bleeding and he looks awful. He wouldn't tell me what had happened, and I was afraid. I wanted to have Dad go to town and find out. Oh, I hope it isn't anything serious. You know how they feel about—half-breeds."

Jimmy laughed softly.

"Don't worry, Dawn. I can tell you what happened."

Without giving himself any credit, he told her about the poker game and about the stolen king of hearts.

"Oh, Jimmy, I'm glad you took his gun!" she exclaimed. "It would go hard with him if he used that gun. I'm glad that's all there is to it."

"That's all, Dawn. Pete was right. Mallette stole that card."

"English Ed came out here a few days ago," she said.

"He did, eh?" Jimmy's tone was belligerent. "What'd he want?"

"Nothing, I guess."

"Nothin'?"

Dawn laughed.

"I didn't meet him. Dad talked to him. He asked Dad about me. And he told Dad that you were almost broke."

"What did your dad say, Dawn?"

"He said that was good."

Jimmy laughed softly.

"I suppose they talked a lot about me, eh?"

"Quite a lot, Jimmy. Dad said that for a college-educated man, you were the biggest fool in the world; he said it was in your blood and that college brought it out."

Jimmy laughed chokingly.

"College!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord, that's a long time back, it seems. I've even forgotten how to talk English. I'm as much a part of this country as if I had been born and raised here. I think like a cowboy, Dawn. Mebby I am goin' broke. I know now that English Ed's games are crooked. That knowledge will save me money. I've been a fool, but I hope to outgrow it. I owe money, gosh! I owe money to the Turquoise City Bank and I owe money to English Ed; but I can pay it all back some day. Your father hates me, because I'm a son of my father. That's a foolish hate, Dawn. He hates the Big 4. That's nothin'—so do I. Dad owns the Big 4, and I ought to be loyal to the darned place, but I can't. I don't like Slim Regan, the foreman. Dad thinks he's a wonder. And there you are. Will you marry me, Dawn?"

But before Dawn could answer they heard the *plop-plop-plop* of horse's hoofs, and turned to see the dark bulk of a horse and rider coming up to the gate. It was Roaring Rigby.

"Well, if it ain't Jimmy Moran and Dawn Conley," he exclaimed.

"Hello, Roarin'," said Jimmy quickly.

"Good evening, Mr. Rigby," said Dawn.

"Nice night," said Roaring. His voice sounded as if he had a bad cold. He cleared his throat harshly.

"Is Pete at home, Dawn?" he asked thickly.

"Pete? Why, yes, he's at home, Mr. Rigby."

"Uh-huh." He appeared miserable.

Roaring turned in his saddle and looked back toward the ford. He felt that it wouldn't be long before some of the Black Horse gang would be riding out that way.

"If it's any of my business—what do you want Pete for?" asked Jimmy.

"It's kinda tough," said Roaring slowly. "You know that I'm sheriff now, don't-cha?"

"I know Randall resigned," said Jimmy.

"And I'm sheriff now, Jimmy. You was in that poker game in the Black Horse tonight, wasn't you?"

"I was. If you mean the trouble between Pete and Mallette, I know all about it, Roaring."

"Mebby not, Jimmy. A while ago they found Mallette over near the end of red-light row, with a bullet square between his eyes."

"My God!" exclaimed Dawn.

Jimmy remained silent. He had seen Pete Conley go out the back door of the saloon, carrying that big Colt gun in his hand. Only a few moments before that, Mallette had gone out through the same door.

"So you see," said Roaring slowly, "you might not know it all, Jimmy."

"Mallette robbed him," declared Jimmy.

"English Ed said you wasn't sure about it, Jimmy."

"English Ed said that; but I'm sure, Roarin'. Right at the time I hesitated. You hate to be sure of a thing like that. I was confused, excited; but, as soon as I had a chance to think about it, I remembered turnin' my cards toward Pete, and I had that king of hearts. I threw my cards over toward Mallette. Mebbe one of 'em turned so he saw what it was. I remember he dealt one-handed, dropping the cards several inches, and one kinda skidded away. It was his way of gettin' that king. And he upsets his chips. That was done to draw our attention away while he got that card."

"I know," sighed Roaring, "it was crooked work; but Mallette didn't have a gun on him tonight."

"You mean they'll call it murder, Roarin'?"

"Looks that way, Jimmy. And Mallette was one of English Ed's men. That means they'll try to take the law in their own hands."

"Well, what's to be done, Roarin'?"

"Let's go and see Pete."

"Will you put him in jail?" asked Dawn anxiously.

"I wish I had him there now," said Roaring. "He'd be safe in jail. Let's go and have a talk with him. Where's your pa, Dawn?"

"He went to the 7AL this afternoon and hasn't come home yet."

"All right; let's see Pete."

DAWN and Jimmy mounted, and they rode to the ranch-house. Pete met them in the living-room. He had covered his split lips with court-plaster. He seemed to realize that something was wrong, and stepped back toward the entrance to the kitchen, as if preparing for a quick retreat.

"Better stay here, Pete," said the sheriff warningly, as he closed the door behind him.

"What do you want?" asked Pete warily.

"Mallette was shot and killed tonight. What do you know about it, Pete?"

Pete stiffened slightly and his eyes shifted from face to face.

"Mallette shot, eh?" He smiled crookedly. "I don't care; he was a thief. Jimmy Moran knows; he saw him steal."

"What do you know about the killin' of Mallette?" asked Roaring coldly.

"Not a damned thing!"

"Not a thing, eh?"

"How would I know?" demanded Pete.

"They told me you went out to get him."

Pete's left hand went to his sore lips and he scowled heavily.

"You come to get me for shootin' Mallette?"

Roaring nodded slowly.

"I'm sorry, Pete. They think you done it, you know."

Pete leaned back against the wall, his right hand swinging close to the butt of his gun. Roaring knew that Pete was fast with a gun. There was something of the trapped animal about this swarthy, bright-eyed young man.

"Peter!" said Dawn sharply. "Don't be foolish."

"You think I want go to jail?" he asked harshly.

"If English Ed and his gang get you, you'll wish you was in jail," warned Roaring.

Pete flashed a snarling grin.

"They come too, eh?"

Jimmy Moran stepped back and opened the door. The hills were bathed in moonlight, making it possible to distinguish objects at quite a distance. He leaned forward for a moment, jerked back and closed the door.

"They're comin'!" he snapped. "I saw two riders cuttin' east down there. They've broken the fence, I'll bet."

"Surroundin' us, eh?" said Roaring quickly. "Pete, you've got one chance. If they get you they'll lynch you quick. Git out through the kitchen! C'mon, Jimmy!"

They ran outside. Their horses were on the dark side of the house. They saw a rider on a light-colored horse, moving along a ridge north of the stables.

It was evident that English Ed's gang was intending to surround the place. Roaring doubted if they knew that he was there.

"Is your bronc still saddled, Pete?" asked Roaring.

"Yeah," said Pete quickly. "I think I might go back town tonight."

"You probably will," said Roaring dryly. "There's one chance in a dozen that you will—and we'll take that one chance."

ENGLISH ED had no trouble in getting up a lynching party. Slim Regan and three of his men were there from the Big 4; Kent Cutter, foreman of the 7AL, and two of his men, showed up in time to join the crowd. There was always a goodly crew of hangers-on at the Black Horse Saloon; always they would willingly ride to a killing.

English Ed did not go with them. He engineered the deal and then stayed at home. At least a dozen armed men rode out of Turquoise City with the avowed intention of making Pete Conley pay for his misdeeds. They rode fast, because they knew Roaring Rigby's horse was gone from his stable, and they knew Roaring had been courting Dawn Conley. They figured that Roaring might tip off Pete and give the half-breed a running start to freedom.

Old Moses Conley had ridden as far as the edge of town with Cutter and his men from the 7AL. They knew he would ride slowly to his ranch; so they rode swiftly to overtake the old man, because he was reputed to be a dangerous man with a Winchester and that he might, if things broke badly for the posse, cause them considerable suffering with that same gun.

They overtook the old man just at the ford of Black Horse river. Cutter knew that Conley was unarmed, so he did not hesitate to tell him what they were coming out there for. He did not tell the old man that they suspected Pete of the killing, but stated Pete's guilt as a fact.

The old man said nothing. The riders hemmed him in, as they crossed the ford. At the corner of the fence they stopped, while two of the men cut the fence wires. There they received their orders for circling the ranch.

"He'll be lookin' for us," said Slim Regan. "We've got to stop him from makin' a getaway. Four of you better go. Head for a point due east of the ranchhouse. Some of us will go through the gate and hold the south line and kinda string around to the west and north. Move in fairly close and wait until I whistle. I don't look for the breed to make a break, but you never can tell."

"Where's the sheriff?" asked Moses Conley. "It seems to me that this is his affair."

"Oh, that damn fool!" snorted a cowboy.

"This don't require any law," said Regan coldly.

"It shore don't require the services of Judge Beal," laughed another.

"Stop all that noise!" snapped Regan. "Do you want to tell him we're comin'?"

"It seems to me it takes a lot of brave men to capture one half-breed," said the old man bitterly.

"It takes twelve men to hang one," retorted Cutter. "We want to make this thing legal."

"Stop talkin'!" warned Regan again.

They opened the gate and rode through, following along the cottonwoods until they came in sight of the house. Cutter took four of the men with him and headed north, with the intention of blocking all chance of escape to the north and west, while Regan led the rest of the men straight toward the ranch-house, where they could block the way to the south.

Regan rode knee to knee with Moses Conley.

Suddenly a shot rang out beyond the ranch-house, and the men jerked up their horses. There was no further need of concealment. They whirled and galloped straight toward the house. Another rifle shot rattled through the hills.

Regan caught a glimpse of a gray horse heading in their general direction, and he thought it was one of his own men, coming back from Cutter's crowd; but the horse swung further to the north and then headed straight for the gate. The light was not so good, but he seemed to remember that none of them was riding a gray horse.

"There he goes!" yelled a cowboy. "That gray horse! It's the one Pete rides! He's heading for the gate!"

There was no chance for Regan and his men to head off this running horse. In some way Pete had luckily ridden between Cutter's men and Regan's detachment. Regan threw up his revolver and emptied it at the horse and rider, knowing that the gun would not be effective at that distance. One of his men carried a rifle, but his horse was a little gun-shy, and the fusilade from Regan's gun had made the horse too jumpy for the rider to hope to hit anything. Cutter's men were coming back, riding swiftly, but the man on the gray horse reached the gate. Riders were coming from all directions and they joined Regan near the gate. Old Moses Conley was forgotten now.

"Damn it, he must have seen us comin'!" panted a cowboy. "He broke for the east, but I took a shot at him, and he cut back this way. How did he get past you, Regan?"

"Didn't see him in time," growled Regan. "That gray horse wasn't visible. Which way did he go from the gate?"

"North," said Cutter. "C'mon!"

They strung out through the gate and galloped north, spreading out like a skirmish line, driving their horses as fast as possible. But every man knew how impossible it would be to catch Pete Conley now. The half-breed knew every angle of the country better than any one else, and with that almost invisible gray horse he could ride into a clump of brush, wait until the riders passed him and then double back.

For thirty minutes they rode straight ahead, searching the country. Regan was about to call the men in and wait until morning, when they saw their quarry silhouetted against the sky on a narrow ridge. He seemed to be waiting for them. Then he dropped off the ridge, seemingly unhurried.

All the men of the posse had seen him. But their horses were getting winded, the traveling was mostly up-hill. They reached the ridge and drew rein. Regan called them together and they held a parley. On the next ridge, not over two hundred yards away, appeared the rider again. He stopped and appeared to be watching them. Cutter borrowed a rifle and fired two shots, but neither seemed to have any effect.

"You can't hit anythin' in this light," growled Cutter, giving back the rifle.

"That half-breed shore has a lot of gall," snorted Regan. "If he wants to play hide-and-seek with us, we'll play.

Let's split up and see if we can't get around him."

The rider moved slowly off the ridge, as the dozen riders spurred ahead, circling from both ends of the line. They passed the ridge, with the end riders swinging farther out all the time.

They had gone about a mile beyond the spot where they had last seen their quarry, when the gray horse moved slowly out of a clump of brush near the crest of the ridge. The horse was led by its rider. They crossed the ridge beside a tangle of brush and rocks, where the man mounted and rode swiftly back toward Turquoise City.

It was Roaring Rigby, the sheriff of Black Horse, riding Pete Conley's gray horse. He came in along the fence and followed it to where the posse had cut the wire near the corner; and there he found his own horse.

He dismounted, tied up the reins on the gray horse, gave it a slap with his hat; it went trotting back toward the Hot Creek ranch. Then he untied his own horse, mounted and rode on toward town.

"I may be old as hell, and funny to look at," he said bitterly, "but I'm smarter 'n all the gamblers and horse-thieves around here."

IT WAS about eight o'clock in the morning when the tired man hunters came back to Turquoise City, empty-handed. Regan had taken his men back to the Big 4, but Cutter brought his men to town for breakfast. All night they had combed the hills, hoping for another glimpse of Pete Conley. They were in a vile humor when they came back.

Cutter rode down to the sheriff's office and found Roaring Rigby just getting ready to go to breakfast.

"When are you goin' to git Pete Conley?" demanded Cutter.

"When?"

Roaring shut one eye and looked curiously at Cutter with the other. Cutter was a small man, slightly gray, with a ferret-like face and a none too pleasant disposition.

"Yeah—when?" snapped Cutter.

Roaring shook his head slowly.

"I ain't goin'," he said slowly.

"You ain't, eh? I suppose murder don't mean anythin' to you, Rigby."

"I dunno—" lazily—"never gave it much thought."

"Oh, you haven't!"

"No-o-o-o."

"Then yo're not goin' out after Pete Conley, eh?"

"Nope."

"Why not?"

"Because he's already in jail."

Cutter's jaw dropped and he looked at Roaring, with his mouth open, gasping.

"In jail!" he exploded. "When did you put him im jail?"

"Last night."

"Last night? Why, we—we—" Cutter spluttered helplessly. "Why, we chased him half the night."

"You did like hell," drawled Roaring. "You started out to foller a gray horse, but the gray horse doubled back on yuh. You're a hell of a man-hunter, you are."

Cutter was speechless. Roaring locked the door, put the key in his pocket and started up the street toward a restaurant, paying no attention to Cutter, who jerked his horse around and rode straight to the Chinese restaurant, where the posse had gone for breakfast.

A tall cowboy riding a bay horse swung into the upper end of the street, and rode toward the Black Horse Saloon, but he saw Roaring on the sidewalk and went over to him. It was "Wind River" Jim, one of Jimmy Moran's men.

He did not know what his right name was. The Arapaho Indians had raised him, his parentage being obscure; and they had named him Wind River Jim. He was tall, tow-headed, lean-faced, addicted to chewing tobacco and profanity, but withal possessed of a certain sense of humor.

"Hyah, Roarin'," he grinned, "Jimmy said fer me to come in and tell you he sent me. He kinda had the idea that you'd need a good deputy, so he picks me."

Roaring Rigby cuffed his hat on one side of his head, looked Wind River Jim over carefully. His face was puckered from an effort to think just what to do. Then he reached in his pocket, took out a deputy's badge and gave it to Wind River Jim.

"Pin 'er on you, cowboy; that's your license to git shot, and no damages asked."

"Do I swear to anythin'?" asked Wind River, as he pinned the badge on his vest, swelling his chest beneath the shining badge.

"Swear to nothin'," said Roarin'. "Make no promises, and you won't have anythin' to break. Here's the key to the office. I'm goin' to ham and egg m'self. See you later."

WIND RIVER JIM rode down to the office, tied his horse to the little hitch-rack, spat vigorously, unlocked the door and went in. He sent his tall Stetson spinning toward a nail, missed it by three feet, sat down in the rickety swivel chair, hooked his feet over a corner of the desk, and yawned.

"Well, I've reached my height," he said aloud. "Officer of the law, and I've got a badge to prove it. Next thing I know I'll be a Senator or some other funny thing, and you never can tell where I'll go from there. Hello, yourself!"

Jefferson Ryker, prosecuting attorney of Black Horse, stepped inside the office and looked curiously at Wind River. Ryker was above average height, but was very thin. He wore tall white collars and a stringy black bow tie. The collar was big enough to give ample play to his Adam's apple. His suit was a rusty black and would have fitted him had he been fifty pounds heavier.

Ryker was rather an old-timer in the country. For a number of years he had operated an assay office in Turquoise City, but with the falling off of the mining industry he had devoted himself to the law, had been admitted to the state bar and was now serving his third term as prosecutor. "Mica" Jones, formerly assistant to Ryker in the assay business, was running the assay office for Ryker, and barely making a living.

Wind River Jim did not like Ryker. He took one look at him and groaned slightly; but otherwise he remained silent, after his first greeting, which had not been returned by Jefferson Ryker. The prosecutor stepped back to the doorway and looked up the street.

"Where's the sheriff?" he asked.

"He's eatin' breakfast."

Ryker leaned against the doorway and examined a cigar, which was rather badly unwrapped. He licked it gently in spots, trying to work the wrapper back into place. Finally he lighted it and puffed convulsively, but got no results.

"Anythin' you want around here?" queried Wind River. "I'm doin' the sheriffin' while Roarin' Rigby nourishes."

"You are?" Ryker looked curiously at Wind River, who gave him plenty of opportunity to see the nickel-plated badge.

"Oh, I see." Ryker came back closer to Wind River. "All right, Wind River, I want to see the prisoner."

"The prisoner?"

"Yes—Pete Conley."

"Huh!" snorted Wind River. "Well, now, from where I set, you've got a fine chance, Ryker."

"I have a right to see him!" snapped the lawyer.

"Yea-a-a-ah, the devil you have!"

Wind River jerked his feet off the desk and faced Ryker.

"Your rights and wrongs don't mean nothin' to me. If you keep your hat on until I let you see Pete Conley, they'll have to saw it off when you're dead."

"I wonder how Roaring Rigby ever happened to appoint such an ignorant person," said the lawyer.

"Because he couldn't trust the smart ones, that's why. The smarter they are the crookeder they are, Ryker, and I've heard that you're the smartest man in this valley."

Ryker walked back to the door, boiling with wrath.

"I'm going to find the sheriff," he said

hotly. "You can't call me a crook and get away with it."

"Well, you're a friend of English Ed."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"He's crooked. You never see a lot of lambs hobnobbin' with a coyote, do you?"

Ryker whirled on his heel and left the office.

Wind River Jim chuckled to himself as he uncoiled his length from the creaking old chair and walked over to a cracked mirror on the wall. He looked intently at himself.

"You don't look crazy to me," he told himself, "but you must be. Appearances are shore deceptive. But I don't like that cat-eyed lawyer, and it was a good chance to let him know it. Anybody who didn't know me would think I was mean as dirt."

The jail adjoined the sheriff's office, and there was no exit, except through the sheriff's office. The front of the jail was a blank wall. At the side and rear were small barred windows, not large enough for a man to crawl through. It was not a well ventilated jail, it is true, but it was built to hold a prisoner.

Roaring Rigby came back a few minutes later, carrying a tray of food for Pete Conley.

"This is your job after this, Wind River," he said, placing the tray on the desk. "What did you say to Ryker?"

"He wanted to see Pete," grinned Wind River. "I told him to go to hell."

Roaring grinned widely.

"I thought so. He shore was sore as a boil. Met me at the door of the restaurant and jumped all over me about you."

"The devil he did! What did you say, Roarin'?"

"Me? I slapped his old face loose from his hat. Mebby that wasn't exactly the right thing for a sheriff to do, but it's all I could think of at the time. I never took no oath of office. Anyway, I don't think there's anythin' in the oath about not slappin' lawyers. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Let's feed the animal."

They unlocked the door into the jail and carried the tray in. There was a short hall, about six feet wide, across the room, at each side of which were barred doors. Pete Conley leaned against the bars of one cell, smoking a cigaret.

"Got you some ham and eggs, Pete," said the sheriff cheerfully.

"Good!" said the half-breed. "What's new?"

Roaring unlocked the door and put the tray on a chair.

"Nothin' much. English Ed's gang is pretty sore. They rode all night. Ha-ha-ha-ha! Aw, they'll cool off. Last night they was in a lynchin' mood, tha's all. Ryker wants to see you, Pete. Jist remember he's the jigger that'll try to hang you. Don't tell him a thing, *sabe?* You don't have to talk."

Pete nodded quickly.

"I like see Judge Beal."

"You can't, Pete; he's the judge."

"He's good man."

"Uh-huh—shore, but he can't see you until you walk into his court-room. You'll have to hire a lawyer, I reckon."

"What for?"

"To prove you didn't kill Mallette."

"What lawyer see who kill him?"

"Oh, hell, there you are, Wind River!" exploded Roaring. "Can you imagine that? What lawyer seen who shot him?"

"I dunno," said Wind River innocently. "Did any?"

Roaring stared open-mouthed at Wind River. Finally he closed his mouth and shook his head sadly.

"Well, I reckon it's all right," he said resignedly. "I hired you because you was honest, Wind River."

"My old man come town yet?" asked Pete, beginning to eat.

"Not yet."

"Huh! How soon they hang me?"

"Are you in any hurry, Pete?"

"Not much."

"Well, that's fine. They'll have to try you first, so you'll jist have to be patient. First they'll give you a hearin' and decide if yo're worth hangin'. Then they'll hold the trial and see when you git hung. It'll take quite a while."

"Nobody ask me if I kill Mallette,"

said Pete, his mouth filled with food. "I like kill him pretty good, but somebody kill him. He stole my money."

"You like to kill him, eh?"

"Sure."

"Uh-huh. You'll make a hell of a good witness for the State—as long as you last."

ROARING left Wind River Jim with Pete and went to see Dr. Shelley, the coroner, who had an office at the east end of the street. The old doctor was a short, fat, breathless man, with two double chins and no waist-line.

"Going to have an inquest, I suppose," puffed the doctor.

"Shore," nodded Roaring. "He won't keep a long while this kinda weather. You fix up about the inquest, Doc. That's somethin' I dunno anythin' about. Are you shore Mallette didn't kill himself?"

"Might have shot himself at long-range. No powder marks on his face, and the bullet went through his head."

"Uh-huh."

"Funny thing," said the doctor. "You know, Mallette wore boots—the short kind. Well, there was dirt in both boots."

"What about it?"

"I don't know; I just mentioned it."

"Uh-huh. Mallette didn't look to me like a man who had taken a bath very often. You fix up about that inquest, will yuh, Doc? You've held 'em before."

"All right, Roaring. Ryker was down to look at the corpse. He says there's no doubt in his mind that Pete Conley killed Mallette. They chased Conley all night last night."

"Yeah, I heard they did."

Roaring didn't bother to tell the doctor that he had Pete in jail. He went from the doctor's office to Judge Beal's home, where Wong Kee opened the door for him. The old judge was slumped down in an old rocker, half dressed, an uncorked bottle of whisky beside him on the table. On his lap was a much worn copy of the Bible.

"Come in, Roaring," he said softly. "Sit down and tell me all the news. We've only heard rumors here. Between Wong's rheumatism and my bottle of rye, we've not been able to get out and gather the news. Have a drink—it's good stuff. Wong, bring the gentleman a glass."

It was evident to Roaring that the judge was mellow with liquor. But that was as far as he ever got—mellow. No one had ever seen Judge Beal drunk—as a drunk is measured in Turquoise City.

Roaring took the drink and told the judge what had happened the night before. The old jurist chuckled over how Roaring drew the lynchers away from the ranch, while Jimmy Moran brought Pete safely to Turquoise.

"Oh, they'd have hung him, Judge," assured Roaring. "Pete wasn't stuck on comin' to jail, but he could see that it was the only safe place for him."

"That's very true, Roaring. I got my second warning yesterday."

"You did? Gosh! What are you goin' to do, Judge?"

The old judge smiled grimly.

"Die in a good cause," he said slowly. "Why run away? I've no place to go. After all, I am the judge of this district. English Ed and his cohorts fear justice, and it may be that English Ed has political influence enough to get a friendly judge elected, or rather appointed, in case he can frighten me into resigning."

"Mebby," nodded Roaring. "He scared Randall out."

"But you are not one of his men, Roaring."

"I hope to die if I am! I've got Wind River Jim for a deputy and I'll run that office as long as she's got a wheel to turn on—and when she ain't, I'll keep her draggin'. I dunno much about my office, Judge. Randall never did tell me much, so I've kinda got to run her by ear. English Ed and his gang don't like me; but that ain't goin' to git me down. Well, I better go back and see how Wind River is makin' out. I plumb forgot to tell him that bein' a deputy sheriff don't give him a right to shoot anybody he happens to get sore at. See you later, Judge."

THE INQUEST over the body of Mallette created quite a lot of interest, and the six jurors did not hesitate to bring in a verdict to the effect that Mallette had been killed by Peter Conley. Roaring Rigby refused to produce Pete in court.

"That half-breed is behind the bars, neck intact," he told the coroner, "and there he stays until he has to go into a reg'lar court-room. There's too much iron among those present, I'll tell you that."

Jimmy Moran's testimony regarding the poker game in which Mallette stole a card was rather in favor of Pete; and the audience enjoyed Jimmy's story of how Roaring was chased by the posse. Jimmy admitted that it was he who brought Pete to jail that night.

Every one noticed that Jimmy showed Dawn marked attention during the trial, and Slim was foolish enough to mention this to Jimmy later on.

"Is it any of your damn business?" demanded Jimmy. "You may be in charge of my father's cattle, but you're not in charge of my father's son. And get this straight, Slim. If I want to marry—"

"Sure, sure," nodded Slim hastily. "Excuse me, Jimmy."

Slim subsided, but he hurried to the telegraph office and sent a long telegram to Franklyn Moran, explaining what had happened and mentioning that Jimmy might need a bit of fatherly advice regarding matrimony. Not that it mattered to Slim, except that he had orders to keep Moran informed on Jimmy's activities. Franklyn Moran loved Jimmy, in his own way, and he wanted Jimmy with the Big 4. According to his views of the matter, the sooner Jimmy went broke, the better, perhaps, for the relations between father and son.

Kent Cutter, owner of the 7AL, failed to see any humor in Jimmy's recital of the fruitless chase of Pete Conley. Kent went back to the Black Horse after the inquest, imbibed a sufficient number of drinks to make him free of speech and then proceeded to tell the world that he didn't care very much for Jimmy Moran.

Lovely Lucas, Jimmy's sole remaining cowboy, was in the Black Horse and heard Cutter's loud-voiced, profane opinion of Jimmy. Lovely was a huge figure of a man. In fact he was so big that his eight and one-half by six and one-half Stetson did not seem at all out of proportion on his head. He had a big nose and an enormous mouth. He had been born and raised in southern Texas, and he had an easy drawl. He sauntered over to the bar, rested one elbow lazily and considered Cutter.

"You jist kinda like to talk, don'tcha?" he said slowly.

Cutter turned his bloodshot eyes upon the bulky Lucas.

"Mebby," he said shortly, and turned his back.

"He-he-he-he-he!" chuckled Lovely. He had imbibed a few drinks himself.

"My talkin' don't ache you none, does it?" demanded Cutter frigidly.

"It ain't got that far—yit," smiled Lovely, "but you've done got to remember that Jimmy Moran is my boss, Cutter. He ain't no damn angel, so anythin' you feel like sayin' about him might better be said to his face, 'cause I'll shore tell him what you said, and I might make it sound a heap worse 'n you would."

"Huh!" snorted Cutter. "That's no dream!"

"I'd prob'ly lie," said Lovely softly.

"You would," admitted Cutter incautiously.

Lovely Lucas moved swiftly for a big man. One huge hand caught the back of Cutter's muffler, while the other caught the back of his cartridge-belt and, with a heave, he swung Cutter off the floor.

"Comin' up!" snorted Lovely, and he swung Cutter over the bar, letting loose of him in mid-air.

The bartender fell out of the way, giving Cutter plenty of room to catch his legs across the top of the back-bar, hooking his spurred heels behind stacks of polished glasses, and bringing everything down on top of him when he crashed to the floor.

Lovely whirled around and headed for the door, his mouth wide open in a chuckling laugh. No one tried to stop him. He crossed the street and went straight to the sheriff's office, where he found Roaring Rigby and Wind River Jim. It was several moments before Lovely was able to tell them what had happened.

"I jist kinda valised him over," laughed Lovely.

"Yeah, and you'll wish you hadn't," said Roaring. "That whole 7AL gang will lay for you."

"But he called me a liar," protested Lovely. "He said somethin' ought to be done about Jimmy Moran marryin' Dawn Conley."

Roaring Rigby shifted his eyes and looked down at his boots. Wind River Jim looked reprovingly at Lovely and shook his head. Wind River knew more about it than Lovely did. But Lovely didn't understand.

"If Jimmy wants to wed with that half-breed girl, I reckon we'll all step out and help make it a success, eh, Roarin'?"

Roaring rubbed a thumb along the edge of his boot-top.

"Yea-a-ah," he said slowly. "I reckon you've got to stick up for your friends, Lovely."

"Shore! That's why I played ante-over with Cutter. He-he-he-he! I s'pose English Ed will send me a bill for damages. Cutter's legs swept every glass off the back-bar."

"And you better tell Jimmy to look out for Ed," advised Roaring. "That gambler ain't forgot that Jimmy cooled him off the night that Mallette was killed."

"Oh, Jimmy ain't asleep, Roarin'. Say, I'll let you in on somethin', if you'll keep still about it. After the inquest, old Mose Conley told Jimmy to keep away from the Hot Creek ranch; said he appreciated what Jimmy was doin' for 'em, but that Jimmy was to keep away from Dawn. I reckon it was because he hates Jimmy's pa. He didn't say that was the reason. Jimmy got kinda hot and told the old man he was aimin' to marry Dawn. He-he-he-he! The old man says Jimmy better think it over a long time, 'cause Dawn is a half-breed; and Jimmy asks him how long he took to think things over before he married Dawn's mother. He-he-he-he-he!

"He had the old man up a stump, but the old man stuck to it. Jimmy asks him what he'll do in case he decides to come to see Dawn. 'I told you not to,' says the old man. 'All men look pretty much the same in the dark, and I've got to protect myself.' And there you are. I didn't talk with Jimmy afterwards; he piled on his bronc and went home."

Some one stopped at the doorway of the office, and they turned to see English Ed. He looked coldly at Lovely.

"You owe me forty dollars, Lucas," said the gambler. "That is the amount of glassware you broke awhile ago."

"Forty dollars," said Lovely softly. "Lotta glasses, Ed."

"A month's salary," said Wind River Jim.

"And here's a letter to take to Jim Moran," said English Ed, handing Lovely an envelope. "You see that he gets it."

"Yea-a-a-ah? And I owe you forty dollars, eh?" Lovely sat up straight and glared at the gambler. "Say! You cold-jawed card-slicker, do you think I'll ever pay that? Pay you forty dollars for busted glasses! Why, I wouldn't give forty dollars for everythin' in your place, even if they'd throw in your hide and taller.

"You think you're runnin' this town, don'tcha? You runs Jim Randall out, but the rest of us has kinda got our heels braced, *sabe?* You've got a couple gunmen dealers over there. Mack Ort and Keno Smiley, I'm meanin'. You had three, until Mallette got hung on the hot end of a bullet.

"Well, you tell 'em to cut loose any old time. See if they can tear forty dollars' worth out of my hide, English; and that's the only way you'll ever collect. Yeah, I know all about the warnin' you sent to Jim Randall. You scared him out; but you ain't scared old Judge Beal out yet. And if I was you, I'd turn right around and go back to my little playmates,

knowin' well that old man Lucas' little boy ain't never goin' to give you that forty dollars. What do you think?"

English Ed did not change expression, no matter what he felt. It was no place for him to protest Lovely's decision. These three hard-bitted cowboys were closer than brothers and, judging from their expressions, welcomed any argument he might start. So he merely nodded coldly, turned and walked away.

Lovely grinned widely and looked at the envelope. It was unsealed, and Lovely did not hesitate to open it and take out the enclosure. It read:

> Jim Moran: Your I.O.U.'s, aggregating over twelve hundred dollars, are long past due. These must be met at once, or I shall be obliged to levy an attachment on the Stumbling K.
>
> —EDWARD HOLMES

"Twelve hundred dollars!" exploded Lovely. "Jimmy shore played high and handsome, didn't he! Whooee! Levy an attachment, eh? What kind of a thing is that, Roarin'?"

"Some law thing. I told you English Ed would shut down on Jimmy."

"And Jimmy can't pay it," declared Wind River Jim. "Why, he ain't got it. Every time pay-day came around he had to sell enough cows to pay us off. Betcha he ain't got fifty head of stock left. The Black Horse Saloon has got rich off of Jimmy Moran. He owes the bank, too. They've got a mortgage for a couple thousand."

"Yeah, it kinda looks as though Jimmy was about sunk," agreed Lovely.

He walked back to the door and looked out. Cutter was crossing the street, looking down toward the office. He met Ryker in front of the post-office, and they went up the street together.

"Cutter and Ryker are pretty good friends, ain't they?" asked Lovely.

"Always have been," grunted Roaring.

"Cutter's prob'ly fixin' to have me arrested," grinned Lovely. "Mebby I better go home while the way is clear. How soon do they have Pete's trial?"

"Next week," replied Roaring.

"Before Judge Beal?"

"If he lives that long."

"Who—Pete?"

"No, Judge Beal."

THE OVERLAND train ground to a stop at the little station of Sibley Junction, unloaded one passenger and a couple of heavy valises, and then hurried on, as if glad to get away.

Sibley Junction consisted of the depot, a water-tank and a saloon. The depot and water-tank were on one side of the railroad; the saloon was on the other. The saloon was a weatherbeaten, false-fronted structure, one side of which still bore traces of having been decorated with a circus poster.

There was no sidewalk, no awning. The false-front leaned back. as if weary of it all. The surrounding hills were hazy with the afternoon heat, and the dust from the passing train seemed to hang suspended in the windless atmosphere. There was no sign of life, except two saddled horses dozing at the hitch-rack beside the saloon.

The lone passenger from the overland picked up his valises and walked heavily to the waiting-room of the depot, dropped the valises and mopped his red face. He was a big man, square-headed, heavy-jawed, well dressed. His baggage was of expensive leather. He looked around sourly as the head and shoulders of a sleepy-eyed depot-agent appeared at the ticket window.

"Howdy, Mr. Moran," said the man with the sleepy eyes. "I kinda thought somebody got off Number Six."

"Yeah!" grunted Franklyn Moran.

"Goin' over to Turquoise City, eh?"

"Yeah. Train on time?"

"Might be here on time tomorrow—not today. They went in the ditch this side of Wiebold, and the report is that they won't move nothin' over this jerkwater line for at least twenty-four hours, Mr. Moran. I'm sorry."

Moran almost exploded. Slim Regan's telegram had caused him to drop everything and head for Turquoise City. And

here he was, twenty-five miles away, with no hotel, no livery-stable, no way for him to travel that twenty-five miles, except on foot.

"That means I can't get a train to Turquoise until tomorrow, eh?"

"Probably about tomorrow even'."

"Anybody around here got a horse I could buy or rent?"

"I don't think so."

"I saw two horses over at the saloon rack."

"Couple of strange cowboys. They rode in today from the Outpost country. Been punching cows for the Muller outfit."

"I wonder if they're headin' for Turquoise City?"

"I don't think so. They asked about the Long Bend country."

"Maybe I better take a look at 'em. I'll leave my baggage here."

Moran mopped his face again and crossed the track to the saloon. It was a dusty, fly-specked place. The bartender was humped over in a chair, reading a paper-backed novel; a gray cat was curled up on the end of the bar, and at the one card table sat two dusty cowboys, eating canned salmon, peaches and crackers.

Moran stopped at the bar and looked around. The bartender showed mild interest, marking the page of his book by crimping a page. The two cowboys did not even show mild interest. One of them was very tall and thin, with a long, serious face, which just now he was stuffing with food. The other was of medium height, broad-shouldered, with very wide blue eyes and a deeply-lined face. Their well worn garb was typical of the cow-country.

"I'll buy a drink," invited Moran.

The tall cowboy swallowed heavily and shook his head.

"Thank you just the same," he said pleasantly. "We tried it."

"They don't know good liquor," said the bartender rather plaintively, and getting to his feet.

"I reckon that's right," nodded the tall one, digging into the salmon can with his pocket-knife.

"Beer?" queried Moran.

The tall one grimaced.

"Hot. There ain't been no ice here since the glacial period."

"What'll you have?" asked the bartender.

Moran considered.

"Anything cold?"

The bartender rubbed his chin ruefully.

"Not that I've seen. Been pretty hot lately."

"I guess I don't want anything, thank you."

"Uh-huh."

The bartender went back to his novel, and Moran sat down near the two cowboys.

"I'm Franklyn Moran," he told them, "from Chicago. I own the Big 4 ranch near Turquoise City."

"What former experience have you had, and why did you leave your last place?" queried the blue-eyed cowboy seriously.

"Eh?" said Moran.

"I was just thinkin' how I'd hate to live here," said the blue-eyed one seriously.

"Mm-m-m-m," muttered Moran. He knew that wasn't what the cowboy had said.

"It's all right, after you get used to it," said the bartending bookworm.

"That may be," smiled Moran. "I expected to catch that afternoon train to Turquoise City, and find that there's a wreck which will take twenty-four hours to clear. I'd give twenty-five dollars for a horse to ride to the Big 4 ranch."

"Twenty-five dollars for twenty-five miles?" queried the bartender.

"It's worth it to me," declared Moran. "If one of you boys will let me have a horse—"

"You must be in a hurry," observed the tall cowboy. He wiped his lips and prepared to roll a cigaret.

"I am. That's my offer. I'd even ride double."

"What kind of a place is this Turquoise City?"

"Wide open town. You boys lookin' for work?"

"No-o-o-o, lookin' for a job. We're too intelligent to look for work, pardner."

Moran smiled and offered them cigars, which were declined.

"How about my offer?" he asked anxiously.

The tall one elevated his eyebrows and looked at his compnnion.

"I'll tell you what we will do with you," said the short one. "You can ride my bronc, if you'll pay twenty-five dollars and give me a railroad ticket to that town. I'll wait for the train tomorrow afternoon."

"Cinch!" Moran dug in his pocket and drew out a ticket. "Here's mine. How soon do we start?"

"Right now, if the bartender will let me have half of his bed tonight," said the short one.

"Pleased to have you," nodded the bartender. "I won't have to talk to myself tonight."

"I'll leave my baggage with you," said Moran.

"All right."

They threw the empty cans outside and went to the horses. The cowboys helped Moran adjust the stirrups to the proper length.

"My name's 'Hashknife' Hartley," said the tall cowboy. "This pardner of mine is named Stevens. Folks call him 'Sleepy,' 'cause he ain't."

"Well, I'm both glad and lucky to meet you," laughed Moran. "There's some trouble over in Turquoise City, and I'm anxious to get over there."

"Trouble, eh?" Hashknife Hartley's long nose twitched.

Moran mounted and picked up his reins. Sleepy Stevens was looking at Hashknife, a queer expression in his blue eyes.

"Seems there is," nodded Moran. "Ready?"

"Yeah," nodded Hashknife. He turned to Sleepy.

"Don't miss that train, pardner; I'll be lookin' for you."

Sleepy nodded solemnly and watched them ride away. Finally he cuffed his Stetson over on one side of his head, spat disgustedly and walked back toward the saloon.

"Trouble!" he snorted aloud. "By God, there wasn't nothin' but a depot and a saloon, a depot-agent and a bartender —and we found trouble jist the same."

THAT same afternoon, which was two days after Lovely Lucas had tossed Kent Cutter over the Black Horse bar, Jeff Ryker, prosecuting attorney, rode out to Conley's ranch, wearing a new mail-order suit and an extra large collar. Dawn saw him coming from afar. She had been expecting Jimmy to ignore her father's warning, and at first she thought it might be Jimmy; but, when she saw who it was, she departed hurriedly, leaving her mother to do the talking.

The very fat, stolid old Indian woman filled the rocking-chair to creaking capacity. She wore an old print wrapper and moccasins, a very brassy necklace and an even more brassy bracelet. Minnie Conley had never become civilized, as far as apparel was concerned.

Ryker rode up to the porch, tipped his hat to Mrs. Conley and dismounted. She nodded coldly. Moses Conley had explained to her that Ryker was the man who would try to hang Peter.

"Rather hot today, Mrs. Conley," he said pleasantly.

"Pretty damn hot," she said forcibly.

"Yeah, it is," he sat down in the vacant chair and mopped his brow. "Hot in town today. I thought I'd take a ride and cool off. Where's Mr. Conley?"

"He not here."

"I see."

He craned his neck and glanced through the doorway.

"Dawn not here," said the woman.

"I see. Well, you're here, Mrs. Conley."

"I here," stolidly. "I mos' always here. Too fat to ride."

Ryker laughed cautiously.

"Well, you're good and healthy, Mrs. Conley."

"Pretty good. What you want?"

"That depends, Mrs. Conley. Peter's in jail, you know."

"I know very well."

"And they might hang him, Mrs. Conley," he said heartlessly.

The Indian woman's eyes flickered for a moment, as she shifted her gaze past Ryker. He watched her face closely, but beyond the flicker of her eyelids there was no emotion.

"And you don't want that to happen," he said softly.

"No," she said. "No want that to happen."

"He's your son," said Ryker.

"You right, my son."

"There's just me and you here, Mrs. Conley. I don't mind telling you, I love Dawn. I want to marry Dawn."

The woman's gaze came back to Ryker, and he shifted uneasily under the stare of those beady eyes.

"You want marry Dawn?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's the idea, Mrs. Conley. I'm a big man in Turquoise City, you understand. If I say they must hang Peter—they hang Peter. If I am going to marry Dawn, I not say for them to hang Peter. You *sabe* that?"

"Damn right!"

"Fine. When Dawn say she marry me, I get Peter loose. If she not marry me—" Ryker hesitated meaningly.

"You hang Peter," said the woman heavily.

"That's the idea, Mrs. Conley. We make a trade, eh?"

"S'pose Dawn no marry you?"

"She like to see Peter get hung?" countered Ryker.

"She not like."

"And there you are, Mrs. Conley. You tell her about it. You not need to tell Moses. He not need to know. Our secret, eh?"

"I not tell nobody."

"Good! Well, I'll be goin' on. Peter have trial next week. You let me know Monday."

Ryker mounted his horse and rode away, well pleased with himself. Once he turned in his saddle and waved back at the huddled figure on the old porch, which did not wave back at him.

After Ryker had passed from sight, Dawn came out. She halted near her mother and stared across the hills toward the Black Horse ford.

"I heard everything he said, mother."

"Good! Ryker *mamook hyas cultus wau-wau.*"

Stress of emotion caused the old squaw to revert to the trade language of her people. Translated, it meant that Ryker made a very bad talk.

"How can he turn Peter loose?" demanded Dawn indignantly. "Is Ryker the law?"

"Croooked!" said the old lady.

"It surely is! If I marry him he'll turn Peter loose. Why, I wouldn't marry him."

"Peter hang, mebby."

"Oh, I don't mean it that way, mother. I want Peter to go free. You know that, don't you? Why, he's my brother; but to marry Jeff Ryker—"

"Too much talk about marry," said the old lady. "Cutter talk to Mose. You don't know. He want marry you. Jimmy Moran want marry you."

"Kent Cutter want to marry me?"

"You right. Mose tell him go to hell."

Dawn laughted bitterly.

"I wonder what's got into 'em? Why don't they come to me, I wonder?"

"Jimmy come to you, eh?"

"Yes," softly.

"Roarin' come to you, Dawn?"

"No."

"He not come to nobody—jus' come. Good man."

"Yes, he's a good man, mother; but I don't want to marry him. Oh, I don't want to marry anybody."

Her mother looked at her keenly for several moments.

"I guess you marry man you want," she said slowly. "Peter have trial next week. Mose hire good lawyer. Mebby

I tell judge what Ryker say. Here come Mose now."

Moses Conley rode to the corral, unsaddled his horse and came up to the house.

"Was Ryker here?" he asked.

Mrs. Conley nodded.

"He jus' stop little while, Mose."

"What for?"

"Dawn."

"Dawn?" Mose Conley twisted his head and looked at Dawn. "Came to see you? What did he say to you?"

"I didn't talk with him."

"He want marry her," said Mrs. Conley.

"Huh!" The old man ran his fingers through his white beard, frowning heavily. "The prosecutin' attorney wants to marry Dawn. That's funny. There's Cutter, Rigby, English Ed, Moran, and now comes Ryker. How do you account for all this, Dawn?"

"I don't," said Dawn seriously.

"You're pretty," said Conley slowly.

"I'm a half-breed."

"You stop that! I hate that word, Dawn. If there's any mixed blood that you might be ashamed of, it's on my side. You mother is an American."

"You right!" said Mrs. Conley. "My father big chief."

"Well, I wouldn't rate him too high," said Conley. "If I hadn't tracked some horses he stole from me to his teepee, I wouldn't have met you; so that's all right."

"That was my grandfather," said Dawn bitterly. "A horse-thief."

"Well," amended Conley, "he didn't really steal 'em, Dawn. Me and him made a deal. He kept six pintos and I took his daughter. That's the only time I ever cheated an Injun."

Conley looked fondly at his fat wife. She smiled. Dawn laughed and turned toward the door, going into the house.

A MOMENT later came the sound of horses, and two riders swept around the corner of the house. They jerked to a stop, throwing a shower of gravel against the steps. Moses Conley sprang to his feet.

The men were Slim Regan and Mark Clayton of the Big 4. Regan whirled his horse against the side of the porch and, at the same time, he covered Moses Conley with a six-shooter. Clayton dismounted.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Conley.

"I'll show you what's the matter with me!" rasped Regan angrily. "Keep your hands above your waist, Conley."

"I'm not armed," said Conley. "What's gone wrong with you, Regan?"

Mark Clayton halted at the bottom of the steps. He held a gun in his right hand and seemed to wait for Regan to give him further orders.

"You know damn well what's wrong," declared Regan hotly. "We found where you cut your upper fence; so we rode down to see what it meant. Oh, we found out all right. There's eight white-faced, Big 4 steers dead at Hot Creek. You let 'em in and then shot 'em for trespassin', eh?"

Conley's right hand went to his beard, trembling slightly.

"Keep your hands still," warned Clayton.

"You don't need to deny anythin'," said Regan coldly. "We've got the deadwood on you, Conley. I reckon you'll claim they didn't have any right there, eh? Mebby not. But that won't help you any. Come off that porch and saddle your bronc. You go to jail, *sabe?*"

"To jail?" Conley shook his head slowly. "I don't know what you're talkin' about, Regan. Put up that gun and let's talk sensible."

"Like hell! Come off that porch."

Mark Clayton holstered his gun, as the old man started to obey Regan. It was evident that the old man carried no arms of any kind.

"Drop that gun, Regan!"

Regan's head jerked sidewise enough for him to see Dawn Conley and the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun.

She was not over a dozen feet away. He dropped his gun. Clayton stood perfectly still. Dawn had circled the house and come in almost behind them. Now she moved closer, holding the big gun easily in her two hands, the first finger of her right hand crooked around a trigger.

"Take their guns, Dad," she said huskily.

Clayton made no objection as Conley removed the gun from his holster. He knew what a shotgun would do at short range, and he had no desire to be picked up in chunks.

The old man took Regan's gun and stepped back to the edge of the porch. Dawn went slowly to him and laid the gun on the porch floor.

"Where do you keep the shells for this gun, Dad?" she asked. "I looked all over for them."

"There ain't any, Dawn," he said. "I've been goin' to buy some, but I put it off."

"Wasn't loaded, eh?" gritted Regan.

"Hasn't been for a week," said Conley.

"Pretty good bluff, at that," said Clayton. "It's all right with me. Any old time you point one of them twin tubes at my anatomy, I sag visibly."

"What's it goin' to get you?" demanded Regan. "Put down them guns. You're goin' to town with us."

"Not now, Regan. The Big 4 can't arrest me. If you've got a complaint to make, go to the sheriff."

"Oh, yes! And have him pull a deal with us like he did with Pete."

"Then go home and mind your own business. I'm not goin' to town with you, Regan. I don't care to see you two any longer than I have to. I fenced this place to keep all the Big 4's off my land; so you better pilgrim home."

Clayton mounted hurriedly.

"We'll come back, Conley," said Regan. "You've butchered eight of our steers on your land, and if the Big 4 don't wipe you off the earth, I'll miss my guess."

They whirled their horses and galloped off down the road. Regan was so mad he spurred his pet saddle horse unmercifully on the way to the gate. The sun was just going down. He wasn't certain just what to do. They drew rein at the gate.

"What are you laughin' about?" demanded Regan.

"I can't help it," chuckled Clayton. "The look on your face, when you saw that shotgun! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Is that so! Well, I didn't see you do anythin', except reach for the sky."

"An empty gun, too! Whooee-e-e! Say, Slim, I never knowed how danged pretty that girl was until now. She's a bird."

"Yeah, and she needs her wings clipped. What had we better do, Mark? We can't let the old man destroy the evidence. It would be like him to drag every steer out of sight."

"Let's go and get Roarin' Rigby. We can come back with him and see that he does what we want him to do. I know I'd like to have my gun; but it'll be dark pretty quick."

"That's the worst of it. Wonder who this is comin'."

Two horsemen were coming up the road from the ford, and the fading sunlight showed them to be riding a tall gray and a sorrel.

"Pretty tall man on that gray," observed Regan.

"Plenty big on the sorrel," Clayton. "I don't *sabe* that tall gray, Slim."

As the riders drew closer, the two men at the gate recognized Franklyn Moran as the rider of the sorrel.

"Well, I'll be danged!" snorted Regan. "Hello, Moran!"

"Hello Slim," called Moran. "Howdy, Clayton."

He shook hands with the two cowboys and introduced them to Hashknife and, at the same time, he told them how it happened that he was riding to the ranch. Slim looked appraisingly at Hashknife. Slim was a cowman and a judge of cowboys. His practised eye noted the riding rig of the tall cowboy, the cut of his well worn chaps, the hang of his belt and gun. His eyes flashed back to Hashknife's serious face, and he half-smiled as he said:

"Boy, howdy! Your outfit never got to lookin' that way from ridin' now and then."

"I've been around," said Hashknife modestly.

"I'll betcha. Lookin' for work?"

Hashknife grinned at Moran.

"Must be a habit in this country, Moran—this 'work' idea."

Moran laughed and explained.

"I was just wonderin' if it was ag'in' the law to wear a gun around here," smiled Hashknife, indicating Regan's empty holster.

"Not unless they get the drop on you!" blurted Clayton. "You tell 'em, Slim."

Slim told them, while Moran swore explosively. Hashknife rolled a cigaret during the recital and tried to appear indifferent, but his eyes smiled when Regan told how Dawn Conley had stuck them up with an empty shotgun.

"That's the dirty old squaw-man I told you about, Hartley," said Moran. "That's how he gets even with me. I'll send him to the pen for that, if there's any law in the county."

"Well, there ain't," declared Clayton. "Roarin' Rigby is stuck on Dawn Conley and—"

"What about Jim Randall, the sheriff?"

"Gone. The Black Horse Saloon outfit scared him out of the country. Roarin' Rigby is sheriff, and he's hired Wind River Jim for a deputy."

"And that is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard," declared Moran. "This country needs a shake-up. What about Jimmy? Oh, you don't need to be afraid to talk in front of Hartley. I've told him all about things."

"Well, there's no secret about him goin' to marry Dawn Conley, I guess," said Slim. "I happen to know Jimmy borrowed money from the bank on a mortgage, and he owes English Ed quite a lot of money.

"You knew they had Pete Conley in jail for killin' Joe Mallette. Well, that same night, Jimmy had a fight with English Ed, and knocked Ed out. That caused bad blood. Then Jimmy and Roarin' Rigby foxed the gang that went out to hang Pete, and got Pete safe to jail. It put Jimmy in bad with a lot of folks. They held the inquest and indicted Pete. Kent Cutter got to talkin' kinda loud about Jimmy in the Black Horse, and Lovely Lucas pitched Kent over the bar, bustin' forty dollars' worth of glasses. Oh, we've had a lot of fun around here lately, but Joe Mallette is the only one that's been killed. You know, the same gang that scared Jim Randall out sent warnings to Judge Beal, but the old judge is still in evidence, although he sticks pretty close to home."

"And all this will lead to more killin'," said Moran. "I'll tell you what to do, Slim. You and Mark go to town and bring Roarin' Rigby out to the Big 4. Tell him I want to talk with him."

"All right. But in the meantime we ought to have a man over on Hot Creek, to see that Mose Conley don't destroy all that evidence."

"And get him shot into ribbons, eh? I know Conley."

"Yeah, I reckon that's true. Well, they're your steers; so you can do as you please. We'll bring Roarin' back with us."

SLIM REGAN was glad that Franklyn Moran arrived in time to take charge of the affair. It would take the responsibility off of his shoulders, and Slim didn't care for responsibility.

He and Clayton splashed through the ford at Black Horse Creek and, about a quarter of a mile beyond, they met Jimmy Moran. Jimmy was alone, singing at the top of his voice. He had a very good barytone, developed to a certain extent in a college glee club.

"Drunk ag'in," declared Mark.

But Jimmy wasn't drunk. He drew up beside them, grinning good-naturedly. Slim Regan scowled. Jimmy had a habit of getting on Slim's nerves.

"Your father just came in," said Slim.

"Yea-a-a-ah? Too much for you to handle, eh?"

"You don't need to let that bother you?" retorted Slim.

"Oh, I know all about it," grinned Jimmy. "You wired him. I got the depot agent drunk, and he told me about it."

"The dirty bum!" exploded Slim. "I'll fix him."

"Well, he told the truth, didn't he?"

"He didn't need to tell anythin'."

"Well, he didn't," laughed Jimmy. "I guessed it, and you bit like a hungry fish. I saw you head for the depot after the inquest; so the rest was a cinch. How's the old man lookin', and what's he goin' to do about it?"

Slim gnawed the corner of his lip.

"He'll do somethin'—that's a cinch," said Clayton. "Old Mose Conley cut his upper fence, herded eight Big 4 steers down into Hot Creek basin and shot 'em. I reckon that'll hold him for a while."

"A-a-a-aw, what are you talkin' about!" snorted Jimmy. "He never did any such a thing."

"Yes, he did," said Slim quickly. "We found 'em, Jimmy. We went down to bring the old man to town, and the girl got the drop on us with a shotgun. Oh, we all know how you feel about that girl—but I'm tellin' you the truth."

"Got the drop on you, Slim?"

"She shore did. Two-barrel shotgun."

"Empty," chuckled Clayton.

Jimmy took a deep breath and grinned widely.

"Well, can you beat that? What are you goin' to do?"

"That's up to your dad. He sent us to town after Roarin' Rigby."

"Well, I'll be darned! Are you sure about them steers?"

"We seen 'em. Eight white-faced steers, with the Big 4's pointin' skyward. No mistake, kid. And the fence was cut."

"Gosh, that's bad, huh!"

"You headin' up that way?" asked Clayton.

Jimmy shook his head quickly.

"Not me. I've been warned to keep away. This is gettin' to be a great place for warnings. I got a tip today that the Black Horse Saloon wouldn't be healthy for me. I suppose the bartender has his orders to put ground glass in my liquor. They tell me that Lovely Lucas mopped off the back-bar with Kent Cutter the other day and busted forty dollars' worth of glasses. This Western country is gettin' tough. Well, you boys better trot along and get the sheriff."

"I reckon we better," nodded Slim. "So long!"

"Want to send any message to your dad?" asked Clayton.

"Yeah. Tell him to mind his own business, and to give Slim Regan orders to the same effect."

Slim turned and glared at Jimmy in the gathering gloom, but Jimmy didn't see the glare. He was riding on, lifting his voice in song.

"He's a tough pup, that feller," growled Slim. "Why, he didn't know I sent that telegram."

"Not until you admitted it."

Clayton turned in his saddle and listened. Jimmy's voice floated back to them. He was singing "The Message of the Violet" from the "Prince of Pilsen." They drew up their horses and listened.

"I wish I had his voice," said Clayton seriously.

"I wish I had his gall," said Slim.

HASHKNIFE HARTLEY instinctively liked Roaring Rigby. There was something pathetically earnest about this new sheriff of Black Horse County, who was willing to admit that he knew little about his duties and limitations.

Roaring had ridden back to the Big 4 ranch with Slim Regan and Mark Clayton. He shook hands gravely with Franklyn Moran and with Hashknife, and accepted Moran's invitation to stay all night. Regan had told Roaring about the dead steers at the Hot Creek coulee.

"That's Mose Conley's idea of retaliation," declared Moran, as they sat together in the main room of the Big 4 ranch-house, the air blue with tobacco smoke.

"Mm-m-m-m-m," mused Roaring, "kinda funny thing t' do. What head

would that come under, Moran? It ain't rustlin'. He didn't steal your cattle."

"Wanton destruction!" snapped Moran.

"They was inside his fence."

"He cut the fence himself."

"Mm-m-m-m-m. Hard to prove, Moran."

"Even that doesn't need proof. He shot the animals. Any jury on earth would convict him."

"Any Black Horse jury would convict Mose Conley of anythin'. Just bring your charge."

"Well, he brought it on himself, Roarin', when he fenced in the only open winter water-hole in the country."

"It's his land."

"I can see where Conley's got one friend."

"Two," corrected Roaring. "Me and Jimmy Moran."

That was a body punch to Franklyn Moran. He got up from his chair and announced that he was going to bed.

"We'll see about those steers in the morning," he said.

Hashknife slept in the ranch-house that night. He tried not to work up any interest in the squabble. He did not care particularly for Franklyn Moran, who was half-Easterner, half-Westerner, and inclined to be proud of his own importance.

Moran had told Hashknife much of the story during their ride from Sibley Junction. He had admitted that he double-crossed Moses Conley in a mining deal, because he was unwilling to match his money against Conley's knowledge. He told Hashknife that he had bought up several prospects which turned out well. In fact, these prospects were responsible for his fortune.

He also explained to Hashknife his reasons for haste in coming to Turquoise City—to break off Jimmy's engagement to a half-breed girl, who happened to be Conley's daughter.

"That's another one of Conley's ideas of getting even with me," he told Hashknife.

"He must kinda hate you," observed Hashknife.

But Hashknife was really more interested in the fact that the sheriff of Black Horse had been frightened into resigning his office by the gambling element of Turquoise City; not that it made any difference to Hashknife, but it was in his blood to seek the reasons for things of this kind.

That was one of the reasons for Sleepy Stevens' outburst against trouble, when Hashknife and Moran rode away from him at Sibley Junction. Sleepy knew what this word "trouble" would mean to Hashknife.

It would mean that the lean-faced cowboy would not rest until it was all straightened out, regardless of the cost. Since the day when George Hartley had ridden in at the ranch that gave him his nickname, he and Sleepy Dave Stevens had been inseparable. They had cast their lots together and had become wanderers of the open places, going nowhere in particular, but always heading for the next hill, just to see what might be on the other side.

Hashknife had been born with an analytical mind. Having had little schooling and having been born in the cattle country, he naturally became a cowpuncher, a rider of bad bronchos—a top hand with cattle. But there was always the urge to follow the trail of trouble, and when he found Sleepy Stevens, blue-eyed, grin-wrinkled, always looking beyond the distant ranges, they went away together, up and down the land, untangling the mysteries of range trouble, seeking no remuneration, asking no thanks.

In many places they were marked men, but this did not stop them from coming back. Life had made them confirmed fatalists, knowing that nothing could happen to them until their time came.

The West did not list them as gunmen; but strangely enough they had gone through many gun battles unscathed, when men faster with guns had gone down. Theirs was the psychology of being in the right.

"Run when you're wrong; shoot when you're right," said Hashknife. "That's

why some of these fast gunmen get killed off—they shoot when they're wrong."

Sleepy Stevens did not analyze anything. He followed Hashknife dumbly, filled with arguments against getting into trouble, deriding Hashknife's ability, vocally fearful of getting killed; and yet he inwardly delighted over it all, anxiously waiting for somebody to start shooting.

The following morning after breakfast, Moran, Regan, Roaring and Hashknife rode away from the Big 4 ranch. Hashknife led Sleepy's horse, as he meant to meet the train at Turquoise City that afternoon.

Regan led the way down to the cut fence at the Conley ranch, and they rode through to Hot Creek. As they came out along the lava beds, high above the creek bottom, they could easily count the eight head of dead steers. Moran swore bitterly against Moses Conley and promised him plenty of trouble for this work.

They circled the lava beds and came down into the bottom. Moran had explained to Hashknife about this warm spring, and Hashknife could see the value of it as a winter shelter and watering place.

"We all used it," said Slim Regan. "Why, you could run a thousand head of cattle in here ahead of a blizzard, and they'd stand it fine and dandy. This country is cold in the winter. The other streams freeze to the bottom."

"Why don'tcha make some kind of a deal with Conley?" asked Hashknife.

"Can't be done; he won't sell out. Moran offered him more than it's worth, but he won't sell. The 7AL has tried to buy it, but didn't have any luck. The old fool won't listen to money."

"Hey!" blurted Roaring. "Look at that animal!"

They had ridden up close to the nearest dead steer. On its shoulder was a spot about a foot square, where the hide had been stripped off.

"The dirty old pup!" wailed Moran. "He's skinned out the brands. But that won't help him. Everybody knows we brand on the left shoulder."

"So does the Stumblin' K," said Roaring thoughtfully.

"Huh!" Moran stared at Roaring. "Is that so! I suppose that squirt of a kid will claim the carcasses, eh? Swear he owned 'em, eh? But you and Clayton saw 'em, Slim. You can swear they had Big 4's, can'tcha?"

"Shore," nodded Slim thoughtfully.

He remembered that he and Clayton had told Jimmy about it last night. Now he wished that he had kept his mouth shut.

"What are you thinkin' about?" asked Moran.

Slim jerked slightly and adjusted his Stetson carefully.

"I was just thinkin' how much gall some folks have."

"Oh, Conley's got plenty of it, Slim. He always did have. Well, what about it, Roarin'? Goin' to arrest Conley?"

"When you swear out a warrant, Moran. Pers'nally, I don't see anythin' to arrest him for. Eight dead steers without any brands don't mean nothin' to me. Lotsa folks around here has white-faced cattle. If you swear out a warrant for Mose Conley, I can't help servin' it."

"I can prove ownership of these dead steers."

"You'll have a hell of a time!"

"Maybe. Oh, let's go to town. This makes me sore; but what I'd like to know is this: Why didn't Conley cut the brands off before you and Clayton saw the animals?"

"That wouldn't have been any revenge," said Slim.

"No, that's true. I've a notion to go over and have it out with Mose Conley right now."

"Hop to it," grinned Slim. "You can shore have my share of it. My gun and Mark's gun are still there, so you might ask him for 'em."

Moran spat out the stump of his cigar and picked up his reins.

"I reckon it can wait," he said. "I'll see him later."

They rode back through the cut fence, instead of going down through Conley's gate. They rode to Turquoise City.

DAWN and her father had been out to Hot Creek earlier in the morning, and they were just as surprized as the Big 4 men had been to find the brands skinned off.

"Mighty queer," said Conley heavily. "I don't understand it, Dawn."

"No one would," replied Dawn.

"The Big 4 is tryin' hard to get me," declared Conley.

He seemed years older today, and he mounted his horse with difficulty.

"Why don't you sell out, Dad?" asked Dawn.

It was the first time she had ever suggested such a thing, and he looked queerly at her.

"I won't be hounded out," he said firmly. "I'll never sell to the Big 4, Dawn."

"Sell to some one else. It will give us enough to take us away from here, and we can start in a new country."

"Oh, I don't know. I feel old today; didn't sleep much last night. I kinda expected the sheriff out to get me, I guess. Don't know why he don't come. The Big 4 killed them steers, Dawn. They cut the fence and drove 'em down here. They want to railroad me out of the country.

"But I'm not goin'," he said, after a pause. "I never done anythin' wrong, and they can't take me. I'll shoot the first man that comes on my ranch."

"The first man might be a friend," said Dawn softly.

"I ain't got a friend. They're all ag'in' me, Dawn. They got Pete into a poker game and stole his money. They knocked him down after they robbed him, and now they'll try to hang him for killin' a thief. Well, they can come and get the old man any time they feel like it—but they'll know they've been to war."

They rode back to the house, where Dawn hitched a horse to the rickety old buggy and drove to town after groceries. She wanted to have a talk with Roaring Rigby about the dead steers and about her father. She knew her father meant what he had said about taking a shot at anybody who came after him.

Roaring was not at the office, but Wind River Jim was there. With him was Jeff Ryker, the attorney. They both knew about the dead steers and were waiting for Roaring to return and tell them the rest of the story.

Wind River told her that Roaring had ridden out to the Big 4 with Regan and Clayton the night before, and hadn't returned yet. Ryker was very pleasant. In fact he was so pleasant that Wind River snorted aloud.

Ryker did not know that Dawn's mother had told her; but he hoped his suit was being looked upon with favor. Neither of them mentioned the dead steers, but Wind River told her that Jimmy Moran's father was at the Big 4.

"He probably came back to try and buy your father out," said Ryker.

Dawn shook her head.

"He knows it's no use," she said. "Dad won't sell out to the Big 4. They've tried enough times."

"So I understand." Ryker rubbed his hands together, causing his celluloid cuffs to click. "Still," he said thoughtfully, "I think he'd be wise to sell the place. Cutter would pay a good price. In fact, I think he made your father an offer, Miss Dawn."

"I don't know," said Dawn. "Dad is queer about that old place. I wish he would sell. It isn't pleasant living the way we do. I know I'd be willing to sell out."

"How does your mother feel about it?"

"Mother doesn't seem to care; it isn't her nature."

They both knew what Dawn meant.

"With Peter in trouble, I don't think Dad would consider any offers," said Dawn.

"Yes, I understand that," said Ryker.

Dawn turned back to the door of the office.

"I believe I'll go out and have a talk with your father," decided Ryker.

Dawn shook her head quickly.

"I don't believe you better, Mr. Ryker. He said he'd kill the first man that comes on the ranch."

"But that is ridiculous, Miss Dawn!"

"Perhaps. But I wouldn't go out there to see how much truth there is in it, if I were you, Mr. Ryker."

Dawn left the office and went back up the street, while Wind River Jim leaned back in the old swivel chair and laughed at Ryker.

"That's a reg'lar family of home folks," laughed the deputy. "Girl sticks up two mad punchers with a shotgun and takes away their guns. Then the old gent declares war ag'in' the world. I only hope he don't decide to attack. As far as I'm concerned, he can jist set there on his porch until the stock rots off his Winchester. I've seen that old pelican throw lead from his old forty-five-seventy, and I don't want him to notch no sight on me."

"But that's a ridiculous situation," declared Ryker, waving his arms helplessly. "The man must be crazy."

"Put yourself in his place, Ryker. His son faces hangin'; they find a lot of Big 4 steers killed on his land, and they're goin' to try and git him for it. What would you do, eh? Wave your arms and talk about it bein' ridiculous? Huh! You make me sick!"

Ryker walked to the doorway and leaned a shoulder against the door-frame. Roaring Rigby, Franklyn Moran, Slim Regan and Hashknife Hartley were riding into the upper end of the street. Hartley and Regan rode in at the Black Horse Saloon hitch-rack, where they tied the three horses, while Moran and Regan came on down to the office. Moran shook hands with Ryker and Wind River Jim, and Ryker wanted to know all about the dead steers.

Moran told him exactly what they had found, and Ryker whistled softly.

"But you're going to have Conley arrested, are you not?" he asked.

"Haven't made up my mind."

"You should; he's out at his ranch, and he says he'll kill the first man that comes out there."

"Yeah? Well, I'll wait until somebody else takes the first chance."

RYKER grinned sourly as he walked away, going to the Black Horse Saloon. He found Hashknife and Regan at the bar. Regan invited him to have a drink; and he introduced Hashknife.

"Ryker is the prosecuting attorney," explained Regan.

"He's the jigger who proves they're guilty, whether they are or not, eh?" laughed Hashknife.

"Something like that," smiled Ryker, accepting the drink.

"You're not part of the law that's been ordered out of the county, are you?" asked Hashknife.

"Not yet. No, they're not on my trail, it seems."

Regan nudged Hashknife sharply. English Ed was coming up to them, and Regan didn't want any arguments started. The gambler looked sharply at Hashknife, when Regan introduced him.

"Holmes owns this place," explained Regan.

"Uh-huh. Quite a place you got, Holmes," observed Hashknife. "Lot nicer than bootleggin' hooch to the Flatheads, eh?"

Holmes started quickly, and for once he forgot to use his poker-face. But he recovered quickly and stared at Hashknife.

"I didn't quite get that," he said.

Hashknife looked at him keenly, his level gray eyes boring into the gambler's face.

"Mebby I'm mistaken," he said slowly. "There was a Holmes that bootlegged hooch to the Flatheads up in Montana a few years ago. He was a remittance man from Canada. Yeah, his name was Ed Holmes. I guess you're not the man."

"I know I'm not," denied Holmes. "I never was up in Montana. I'm not sure I got your name."

"Hartley. My friends call me Hashknife."

"I see, you're a stranger here. Going to stay long?"

"I dunno. I'll buy a drink."

"No; this is my treat," said the gambler, motioning the bartender. They

drank a "good luck" to the house, and Holmes excused himself.

"Glad to see you any time," he told Hashknife. "Make this your headquarters."

"Thanks," grinned Hashknife; he watched the gambler cross the big room to a poker table.

"Jist how near right was you about that Flathead deal?" queried Regan.

Hashknife laughed, but did not reply.

"You are probably mistaken," said Ryker softly.

"Is that a legal opinion, or man to man?" asked Hashknife.

"Merely my opinion," said Ryker seriously. "Now, I'll buy."

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"Nope, I've had enough, pardner. Knowin' when to quit is a failin' I've always had."

They left the bar and went to the sidewalk, where they met Kent Cutter and two of his men. Regan introduced Hashknife to them, and Cutter offered to buy a drink, but Hashknife and Slim declined. Not so Ryker. He went in with them, while Hashknife and Regan walked to the depot to see whether the train would be in on time.

The few drinks had made Ryker expansive. He wanted to tell Cutter what Hartley had said to English Ed, but English Ed joined them before Ryker had a chance to do much talking.

"Where did that fellow come from?" demanded English Ed.

"He brought Frank Moran from Sibley Junction," explained Ryker. "His partner rented his horse to Moran, and the partner will be in on the train today."

"Looks kinda forked," observed Cutter indifferently.

"He is," said English Ed. "That's Hashknife Hartley. He's a cattle detective."

"Oh-ho-o-o!" grunted Cutter. "Association man, eh?"

Ryker grinned half-drunkenly.

"He knew you, didn't he, Holmes?"

"That's my business. You keep out of it."

"That's all right," grinned Ryker.

"What's he doin' here?" wondered Cutter.

"Maybe Franklyn Moran knows."

"There's been no rustlin' around here, Ed."

"What about those dead steers at Conley's?"

"Pshaw! They were killed yesterday. I think he just happened to come here. Mebby he—" Cutter hesitated— "Mebby he came here to investigate the killin' of Joe Mallette."

English Ed squinted at himself in the back-bar mirror.

"I don't know who would hire him to investigate that."

"Conley might," suggested Ryker.

"That's true enough," agreed Cutter. "If Hartley is an Association detective, like you say, Ed, he'd have a slick way of comin' into a place, wouldn't he? Detectives don't usually have a brass band and a lot of banners."

"I suppose that's true," nodded the gambler.

Ryker laughed outright and reached for the bottle on the bar.

"I wonder if Hartley has seen Conley. The old man is out at his house with a Winchester in his hands, and he swears he'll kill the first man that comes on the place."

"How do you know?" demanded Cutter.

"His own daughter told me awhile ago."

"Yeah, and he'll do it, too," said Cutter. "I'm shore glad I don't owe him any visit."

Mack Ort, one of English Ed's gamblers, came up to the bar, nodding to the three men. Ort was a slim, dark-faced man of about thirty-five, reputed to be a gunman. Little was known of him in Turquoise City, except that he had cold, hard nerve, and very little sense of humor.

English Ed's other gunman was Keno Smiley, a tall, tow-headed person, with a huge nose and a long, lean jaw. It was rumored that Smiley had left the mining camps of the Cœur d'Alenes just two

jumps ahead of a United States marshal; but this rumor had never been confirmed.

Smiley had been picking out a tune on the piano with his long, lean fingers, but now he sauntered up to the bar beside Ort.

"Who was that puncher with Regan, Mack?" he asked.

"I dunno," replied Ort. He turned to Cutter.

"Know who he is, Cutter?"

"That tall feller? Yea-a-ah. They tell me he's a detective from Northern Idaho, Mack."

Cutter seemed serious, but Smiley saw the grin on Ryker's lips. He flushed slightly.

"You tryin' to be funny, Cutter?" he asked.

"Not a bit, Keno. Go ask English Ed."

"Does English know him?" asked Ort.

"To his everlasting sorrow," grinned Ryker.

"What does he want here?" demanded Smiley.

"Give him enough time and he'll probably show you," said Ryker.

"Well, he's got nothin' on me," declared Smiley.

"Nor me," echoed Ort. "Let's all have a drink."

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THE TRAIN was late that afternoon. It had taken a long time to clear away the wreck. Hashknife was alone at the depot, when Sleepy climbed off the train, a wide grin on his face. He had Moran's two valises, but Moran had told Hashknife to leave them at the depot, because he and Regan were going back to the Big 4.

"I was sure glad to see this train pull in at Sibley," grinned Sleepy. "That bartender drove me wild. When he ran out of talk about himself, he read out loud from his book. Where's the horses?"

"Tied to a hitch-rack up the street, Sleepy."

"Uh-huh," Sleepy's blue eyes studied Hashknife seriously.

"How soon do we pull out, Hashknife?"

"Most any time, I reckon."

"Oh!" he exclaimed in surprise.

Sleepy was rather taken aback. Hashknife lighted a cigaret and sat down on the rear platform of the depot.

"Remember Ed Holmes, the remittance man, who bootlegged hooch to the Flatheads, Sleepy?" he asked.

"Holmes? Lemme see—Holmes. Remittance man, oh yeah."

"He's top hand in a big honkatonk here. Owns the place. I sprung the bootleg thing on him and he flinched; but he shook out of the loop pretty quick and denied everythin'. I admitted I might be mistaken; but he knows I ain't, and he knows I know it. Got a few gunmen workin' for him. Somebody has scared the sheriff out of the country, and tried to scare the county judge, but he don't scare. Tin-horn gambler got shot by a half-breed a few days ago, but they got the breed. Old Man Moran owns the Big 4, and his wayward son is in love with this half-breed's sister. Yesterday they found eight Big 4 steers dead on this squaw-man's place, but before they got the sheriff out to see the evidence, somebody skinned out the brands. And that's about all there is, Sleepy."

Sleepy sighed deeply and rolled a cigaret.

"I'm shore glad," he said slowly. "I tell you I was scared there might be trouble over here, and that you'd get your long nose into it. Didja get the twenty-five from Moran?"

"Y'betcha."

Sleepy smoked slowly, eyeing the main street of Turquoise City.

"Didja meet young Moran?" he asked.

"Nope. Regan, the foreman of the Big 4, told me a lot about him. Wild young Irishman, I reckon. Busted with his father, they say. Took the money his mother left him and bought a ranch here. Too much liquor and cards have put him on the rocks, but he's still a wild go-devil. Sent word to his father to mind his own damn business.

"The sheriff is a character, Sleepy. You'll like him. He ain't got a brain in his head, and he's got a deputy that don't

know there ever was a Civil War—and don't care. This sheriff was a deputy just long enough to learn how to pin his badge on right side up. There's nobody to show 'em what to do. I met the prosecuting attorney. Queer looking jigger, named Ryker. Wears celluloid cuffs and a collar two sizes too big. Ex-assayer. Still owns the assay office here.

"They tell me that the judge is an old-timer here. Lives alone, with a crippled Chinese cook. Square as a dollar, drinks like a fish and thinks the town needs cleanin'."

"What about this half-breed girl?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife smiled softly over his cigaret.

"I haven't seen her, Sleepy. Regan says she's as pretty as a picture. She stuck Regan and one of the cowboys up with a shotgun and took away their guns last night."

"Um-m-m-m-ha-a-ah!" grunted Sleepy. "Beauty is as beauty does. I'll say she ain't no frail lily. And it's her brother they've got in jail, eh?"

"And the sheriff is also in love with her," smiled Hashknife. "I dunno how many others. And her old man sits on the porch with a great big .45-70 Winchester in his hands and swears he'll kill the first man that shows up on his land."

Sleepy stretched wearily and threw away his cigaret.

"I shore didn't sleep much last night. Every time I turned over I knocked the bartender out of bed, and every time he turned over he knocked me out. I ate more cheese, crackers and salmon for supper, salmon, cheese and crackers for breakfast, and I ain't had no dinner today. Let's put on a feed-bag."

They went to a restaurant next door to the Black Horse Saloon, where they found Roaring Rigby and Wind River Jim, sitting at a table with Jimmy Moran. Roaring waved a fork at them, inviting them to sit at his table. He introduced Hashknife, after which Hashknife introduced Sleepy to all of them.

"This is Frank Moran's son," explained Roaring. "Owns the Stumblin' K, and is master of his own soul, ain'tcha, Jimmy?"

"To my own sorrow most of the time," grinned Jimmy. "Dad probably painted a scarlet picture of me, didn't he?"

"He said outside of bein' a proper damn fool, you was all right," replied Hashknife seriously.

"Well, that's kinda soft language for him," laughed Jimmy. "He hates me because I'm such a success. Right now I'm just one jump ahead of the sheriff. Ain't that right, Roarin'?"

"Yeah, that's right, Jimmy."

Jimmy was facing the door. Suddenly he slid away from the table, grabbed his hat from a nail on the wall and headed for the door. Roaring twisted his head around and looked toward the front window in time to see Dawn Conley ride past in the rickety old buggy. Jimmy was already outside.

"Bet she came back to see you, Roarin'," said Wind River. "She was at the office this mornin', and she told Ryker her old man was gunnin' for anybody that showed up on his ranch. I reckon she was a little nervous."

Wind River walked to the window and looked out, but he came right back, nodding his head.

"Her and Jimmy are in front of the office, talkin'."

Roaring was staring at his plate; his lips shut tightly. Hashknife watched the expression of his face, as he lifted his eyes slowly and cleared his throat.

"That's all right," he said, trying to make his tone indifferent. "They've prob'ly got things to talk about."

The men resumed their meal, but something had caused the conversation to lag. It was possibly ten minutes later when Jimmy came in. He sat down across the table from the sheriff, his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands.

"Roarin'," he said slowly, "Dawn wants to see you."

"To see me? What for, Jimmy?"

"It made me laugh," said Jimmy seriously. "You probably won't see anythin' funny about it. When Dad and Slim Regan left here this mornin', Dad got the

idea of goin' to see Conley. I suppose he was goin' to tell Conley what he thought of him. Dad would, you know. He hasn't any sense of humor, I guess. And Slim's a sort of a fool, too. He'd back any play that Dad started. So they went over to see Conley—or rather that seems to have been their idea. It—"

"Say!" blurted Roaring anxiously. "Who got killed?"

"Oh, it wasn't that bad, Roarin'. They got in reach of Conley's Winchester, and Dad's horse got killed. He piled on behind Slim, and they high-tailed it for the ranch. Dawn has the idea that you might be able to do somethin'. Might go out and explain to the old man that—"

"Me? Me go out there and—and—yea-a-a-ah! Like hell!"

"Well, go down and talk with her, Roarin'. She's upset."

"So was your pa," grinned Wind River Jim.

"But I can't do a thing," protested Roaring.

"Is the old man crazy?" asked Hashknife.

"He is not," declared Jimmy. "He's mad. He thinks they're all pickin' on him. He hates Dad. He gave me orders to keep away. His son is in jail charged with murder and he thinks everybody is against him. And," sighed Jimmy, "he may be right about it, at that."

Roaring got heavily to his feet, yanked his Stetson down over his ears and went scuffling toward the door. Wind River Jim choked on his coffee and wiped the tears out of his eyes.

"He's a great sheriff, that feller," said Wind River.

Roaring found Dawn waiting for him in front of the office. She looked searchingly at him and he grinned rather foolishly.

"You know what happened, don't you?" she asked.

"Yu-yes, Jimmy told me. I dunno." Roaring shoved his hat on the back of his head and rubbed his chin with the palm of his right hand. "I dunno what to do," he said.

"I don't either," she said. "Dad's stubborn. It will mean a killing, I'm afraid. But it was wrong for Slim Regan and Mr. Moran to come. Slim knew how Dad feels. Oh, it was lucky that only the horse was killed."

"Lot of luck depends on your aim, when you shoot as well as your dad does, Dawn. Did he shoot more 'n once?"

"No, just once."

"Makes it look better," said Roaring, "but what can I do?"

"Can't you come out and have a talk with him?"

"And git my earthly envelope all gummed up?"

"I don't believe he—if he knew you were just coming to talk with him, he wouldn't harm you."

"Talk to him about what, Dawn?"

"Oh, about everything. Try to make him understand. He's bitter. Sometimes I think he's losing his mind. He hasn't hired a lawyer for Peter. I asked him why he don't, and he says it's no use. He says that the Big 4 and the Black Horse Saloon are running the country and that they'll hang Peter in spite of any lawyer."

"Pshaw, that ain't no way to feel," said Roaring slowly. "Old Judge Beal ain't against your dad."

"No, he's honest. Dad knows he is; but Dad says they'll kill him before the trial."

"Uh-huh," Roaring caressed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, I dunno; mebby they will."

"And what chance has an honest judge, if a crooked jury brings in a verdict of guilty?"

"Shore, that's the worst of it. I tell you what you do. You tell your dad I'll be out this evenin', and we'll see what we can figure out. Pers'nally, I think he had a right to hoodle Moran and Regan off the ranch. They had plenty of warnin'."

"I'll tell him," said Dawn wearily. "He likes you. But I hope nobody else comes."

"I hope to gosh he don't mistake me for anybody else."

Dawn climbed into the buggy, while Roaring untied the horse.

"Why did Jimmy Moran's father come here?" she asked.

Roaring tied up the rope carefully, looked the patched harness over and stepped aside.

"Don't you know?" she asked.

"You better ask Jimmy," he said. "He knows more 'n I do about it."

"Was it about me, Roaring?"

Roaring leaned back against a porch-post and looked at the horse.

"Don't let that git you down," he said softly. "Lotsa parents are like that; they prob'ly didn't pick so well themselves and they want to try and help the kids."

Dawn drove away from the hitch-rack, and Roaring watched until she disappeared. The men were coming from the restaurant, so he went to meet them. But he didn't tell them that he was going out to talk with Moses Conley.

Hashknife and Sleepy got a room at the Turquoise Hotel and put their horses in the livery-stable. Jimmy Moran had taken a liking to them and had introduced them to every one they met.

IT WAS about an hour after dark when Lovely Lucas came into the Ranger saloon, where Hashknife, Sleepy and Jimmy were playing seven-up, and announced that the Big 4 outfit had come to town in force.

"The whole works, I tell you," declared Lovely. "Old Man Moran, Slim Regan, Clayton, Allard, Creswell and Pitts. They're all in the Black Horse, except Slim. He went down to see the sheriff."

The game broke up immediately, and the four men trailed up the street past the sheriff's office, where they found Wind River Jim alone.

"Yeah, it was about that shootin' today," said Wind River. "The whole Big 4 is b'ilin' mad. They hopped all over Roarin' when he said there wasn't anythin' to be done about it. He's over in the Black Horse, arguin' about it with 'em right now."

"Pretty sore, eh?" said Lovely.

"Right to a head."

Jimmy touched Hashknife on the arm.

"I'll see you later, Hartley," he said.

"Yeah, all right," replied Hashknife, and Jimmy hurried up the street.

They listened to Wind River Jim's opinion of the case, and then they moved over to the Black Horse. Lovely demurred about going in.

"I owe 'em forty dollars for busted glass," he said. "If I go in there I might have to kill somebody. You boys go ahead and hear what's bein' said."

Hashknife and Sleepy strolled in unnoticed. The Big 4 gang was at the bar with Roaring Rigby; Slim Regan seemed to have the floor.

"It jist means that there ain't no law here," decided Slim, "and when there ain't no law, it's up to the citizens to make a little."

"When you jiggers git through runnin' off at the neck, I'll speak my piece," said Roaring. "Through yet? Can't think of another thing to say? Fine. You've talked a lot and ain't said anything. In the first place, Old Man Conley owns that land. He's got it fenced. You know he fenced that to keep the Big 4 off his land. There's been bad blood between him and Frank Moran for twenty-five years. You and Moran both know that Conley said he'd shoot the first man to come on his place. And yet you went on, didn't you? Trespassed, didn't you?

"Started over there with the intention of givin' him the devil over them steers. And all he done was to make good his promise. You got off easy. That old pelican can hit a gnat in the eye at fifty feet. All you lose is one horse. What you ought to do is to write him a letter tellin' him you're much obliged."

It was a long speech for Roaring Rigby.

"If Conley didn't have a pretty girl, you'd talk different," said one of the men farther back in the room.

Roaring whirled quickly, but he did not know who had made the remark.

"Will the dirty bum who made that remark say it once more?" he asked coldly.

But no one spoke. They knew the temper of that sad-eyed, bat-eared sheriff, whose shoulders hunched as his eyes

swept the faces under the hanging lamps.

"Your arguments hardly do justice to your office," said Franklyn Moran. "We have demanded the arrest of Moses Conley on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon. I didn't know that this county paid you a salary as a debater."

"You've got all the argument you'll git from me," said Roaring.

He turned his back on them and stalked from the room. Several people laughed, but he did not turn his head. Nor did he hurry as he crossed the street. They could see him from the lighted windows, as he went slowly toward his office. But once inside that office he did not move so slowly. Wind River Jim stared at him, as he sprang to the gun-rack, grabbed down a rifle and a belt of ammunition.

"You stay here, Wind River," he ordered, and ran out through the back door.

Wind River walked to the front door, where he leaned out, chewing his tobacco violently. It was possibly five minutes later that Hank Pitts and Mark Clayton strolled past.

"Hyah, Wind River," greeted Hank. "Howsa job?"

"Swell, elegant, Hank; beats punchin' cows."

"I s'pose it does," agreed Hank. He craned his neck past Wind River and looked into the office.

"Roarin' ain't home, eh?"

"No-o-o-o, he ain't exactly home jist now; he's out."

"Where'd he go?"

"Well, he didn't leave no address," grinned Wind River. "Didn't say nothin' much. He ain't much of a hand to talk. Pers'nally I think he went huntin' bear."

"Bear!" blurted Clayton.

"Prob'ly." Wind River spat across the sidewalk. "Anyway, I'd say he was heeled for bear. Took a thirty-thirty and a full belt of shells along, and he went out that back door like somethin' was bitin' his heels."

"By golly, I told Slim!" snorted Pitts and, without waiting for any more information, they started on a run for the Black Horse Saloon.

"Well, that's shore queer," observed Wind River. "Jist like I'd touched a match to 'em."

Pitts and Clayton ran to the doorway of the saloon, where they met Regan and Moran, who were coming out.

"Gone!" exclaimed Pitts. "Took a thirty-thirty along. He's gone out to the Hot Creek ranch."

"Yeah, and we're goin' along," said Regan. "Get the boys."

Hashknife and Sleepy came out and Regan saw them.

"Want to ride out and see the fun, Hartley?" he asked.

"What fun?" asked Hashknife.

"Out at the Conley place. Old man's crazy. When we finish up tonight he'll be in jail and we'll strip every strand of wire off his fence. This half-witted sheriff has beat us to it, he thinks. But if he won't enforce the law, we'll have to. Better come along and see the fun."

Hashknife shook his head slowly.

"No-o-o-o, I reckon not, Regan. My sense of humor don't run to laughin' at folks who make mistakes."

"Well, he's made his last mistake," laughed Regan.

"I wasn't thinkin' about old man Conley," said Hashknife.

The men were mounting at the hitch-rack, and one of them called to Regan.

"I didn't quite get what you meant, Hartley," he said.

"Better think it over on your way out, Regan."

Regan turned and went to the rack.

"Thank the Lord it's none of our business," said Sleepy, as the men rode away.

"Don't lie," cautioned Hashknife. "Your knees itch for the feel of a saddle right now. You're dyin' to ride with 'em, and you know it."

"So are you, Hashknife."

"I didn't thank the Lord for anythin', did I? Let's play three games of pool and then go to bed. I'm tired."

"Will we play in here?"

"Nope, down at the Ranger. This Black Horse ain't safe."

JIMMY MORAN lost no time in leaving Turquoise City. He knew the temper of the men from the Big 4, and that they would take the matter in their own hands if his father was willing.

If his father had led them to town to talk with the sheriff, it was a sure thing that the Big 4 intended to do something. Jimmy realized that their intentions might be merely to capture Conley and put him in jail; but the capture might result in bloodshed. Conley was a fighter.

Jimmy intended to ride to the Hot Creek ranch, warn Conley and give him plenty of time to get away. He felt sure that Conley would be sensible enough to hide out until the wrath of the Big 4 cooled off a little.

He ran his horse all the way to the ford and found that the fence had not been repaired; so, instead of going around the road, he cut across the ranch. He wanted all the time he could get to present his argument to Conley. He would invite Conley to come to the Stumbling K. That would be the last place they would ever look for him.

There was no moon, but Jimmy was familiar with the lay of the land. He thought at first that the ranch-house was in darkness, but a thin thread of light peeped out from beside a curtain.

Jimmy dismounted a hundred feet away from the house and dropped his reins. It was ticklish business, he decided. He did not know that Conley was expecting Roaring Rigby. Jimmy sneaked in like an Indian; he meant to announce himself to Conley from a safe position.

A huge wild-rose bush grew at one corner of the porch, and just to the left of the corner of the house grew a twisted cottonwood that nearly covered the side of the house. There was a window just beyond the cottonwood, almost hidden behind the tangle of foliage. Jimmy sneaked in close to the cottonwood and picked up a handful of small pebbles, which he flung against the window with considerable force. For several moments there was no sound. Then came Conley's voice, muffled—

"Who's there?"

"Jimmy Moran," called Jimmy. "I've got to talk with you, Mr. Conley; and we better make it fast, too."

Conley did not reply. Jimmy waited, wondering what Conley was going to do. He thought he could hear the sound of a running horse. From where Jimmy crouched he could not see the doorway, but he did see the lamplight streak across the corner of the porch when the door opened.

The galloping horse was closer now. As Jimmy turned his head, looking down the stretch of road which led to the gate, a gun-shot crashed out so close to him that he sprang back, throwing up one arm, as if to protect his eyes. There was the dull thud of a falling body; a woman screamed.

Jimmy sprang forward, drawing his gun. He thought he saw a man just beyond the rose bush and instinctively he fired his gun at whatever it was. Then he stumbled across the porch and found himself looking down at Moses Conley, who was stretched full length on the porch.

The door was open behind him, the lamplight falling full on Jimmy, and he saw Dawn, white-faced, staring at him. The horse jerked to a stop behind him, but Jimmy did not turn until Roaring Rigby stepped in behind him, putting his hand on Jimmy's shoulder. Dawn came closer, and her eyes were wide with horror. Roaring shook Jimmy slightly.

"How did it happen, Jimmy?" he asked huskily.

Jimmy shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "I—I—"

He saw Dawn's staring eyes. Roaring was taking the gun away from him. Jimmy stepped back.

"You think I shot him?" he asked hoarsely.

"He told you to keep away, you know," said Roaring sadly. "Don't try to run away, Jimmy. Help me take him inside."

"Run away?" Jimmy's voice was strained. "Oh, my God!"

Together they carried Moses Conley

into the living-room and laid him out on the floor. Dawn dropped to her knees beside him.

"He isn't dead!" she exclaimed. "Somebody get the doctor—quick!"

"Floor no good," grunted Mrs. Conley. "Put on bed."

No one had noticed her before. They placed him on a bed.

"I better go for the doctor," said Jimmy anxiously.

Roaring looked at Jimmy and shook his head slowly.

"Better wait, Jimmy; we'll go together."

"You mean I'm under arrest?"

"Somethin' like that, Jimmy. Good Lord, I'm sorry. I—"

Roaring took Jimmy's gun from inside his belt and examined the cylinder. One chamber was empty, and the barrel smelled strongly of burned powder.

Roaring turned to Dawn and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Tell me what happened," he said.

"Oh, I don't know. Dad was expecting you. Some one threw something against a window, and Dad asked who it was. I—I heard Jimmy answer. He told who he was. I don't think Dad wanted to open the door, but I—oh, I asked him to. And when he opened the door—"

"Yeah," said Roaring miserably. "He wasn't armed either."

"Yes, he was," said Dawn. "I—I think his gun flew out of his hand. There were two shots fired."

"I shot one of 'em," said Jimmy quickly. "I thought I saw somebody."

"Somebody come," said Mrs. Conley.

The front door was wide open, and when they looked out the yard was full of men and horses. Roaring met them at the doorway.

"Smart, eh?" growled Regan. "Sneaked out on us, eh? Where's old Moses Conley?"

"Don't yell," said Roaring. "Send one of your men after the doctor; Moses Conley has been shot."

Franklyn Moran crowded in past Roaring and met Jimmy face to face.

"What are you doing here, Jimmy?" he asked harshly.

Jimmy's lips were tightly shut and his face seemed pale in the yellow light.

"You let him alone," said Roaring. "He's my prisoner."

"Your prisoner?" Franklyn Moran's eyes opened wide. "What do you mean, Rigby?"

"Will one of your men go after the doctor?" asked Roaring. "If we don't git medical help it might mean murder."

"Do you mean to say that my son shot Moses Conley?"

"Mark," said Regan, "you and Hank go and get Doc Shelley. Tell him to come as fast as he can."

Franklyn Moran went to Roaring and grasped him by the arm, repeating his question.

"Oh, hell, don't paw me!" growled Roaring. "What if he did? You led your men out here to do the same thing."

Franklyn Moran turned and looked at his men. None of them met his gaze.

"I'm not goin' to run away," said Jimmy. "See if you can't do somethin' for the old man before the doctor gets here. If you can't, I can. I know something about first aid."

"Hop to it," said Roaring.

Jimmy started to go into the bedroom but Dawn stepped in front of him.

"Mother knows what to do," she said evenly.

Jimmy stared at her and his face twisted painfully.

"Can't I help her, Dawn?" he asked.

"I'm helping her," she said and turned away.

Jimmy walked across the room and stared out through the branch-covered window against which he had thrown the gravel. The men were silent. Some of them rolled smokes, but went out on the porch to light them. They could hear the drip of water, as the old Indian woman squeezed out a towel; they heard a whispered conversation between Dawn and her mother.

Roaring went outside and hunted in the grass just off the porch, where he found

Moses Conley's revolver. It was an old, single-action Colt .45, and in one of the cylinders was an empty cartridge. He brought it into the house to examine it. Franklyn Moran saw the empty shell.

"How many shots were fired?" he asked softly.

"Two," said Roaring. "I heard 'em both. There's a chance for him to prove self-defense. Moran must have fired first."

"That's good," whispered Moran. "I'm glad there's a chance."

"Oh, as far as that's concerned, Conley was lookin' for it," said Regan coldly. "A Black Horse jury will look at it right."

"Oh, damn you all!" gritted Jimmy. "That's all you think about! Beatin' the law. Damn you and your Black Horse juries! I never shot Conley."

"That's all right, Jimmy," said Roaring. "Don't yell."

"Why would I?" Jimmy turned appealingly to them. "Don't you understand? I—I—" he choked—"I'm goin' to marry Dawn, if she'll marry me. Would I harm her father?"

"Any man will shoot in self-defense," said Regan.

Jimmy groaned and turned away. Roaring went into the bedroom, and Jimmy saw Bill Creswell signal him cautiously to make a getaway, indicating that there was plenty of room to pass between him and the door. Jimmy liked Creswell and he realized that Bill meant it all for the best. But Jimmy shook his head firmly and turned back to the window. Creswell shrugged his shoulders. When Jimmy looked back at Creswell, he pantomimed that Jimmy could take his gun, as he went out. Perhaps he thought that Jimmy didn't want to go unarmed. But Jimmy declined, and Creswell sighed deeply. He had done the best he could for a friend.

It seemed ages to Jimmy before the doctor arrived, but in reality Hank Pitts and Mark Clayton had broken all speed records in getting old Doctor Shelley from Turquoise City to the ranch. They had taken him through the ford so fast that all three of them were drenched, and the old doctor was as mad as a hornet.

Roaring went into the bedroom with him while he made an examination and, in a few minutes, Roaring came back to the men, advising them all to go home.

"The doctor says he's got a slim chance," said Roaring.

"That bullet missed his heart about three inches."

He turned to Jimmy Moran.

"Where's your bronc, Jimmy?"

Jimmy told him where he had left it, and Roaring sent one of the Big 4 cowboys to git it. Franklyn Moran went up to the sheriff.

"You going to put him in jail?" he asked.

Roaring cuffed his hat on the side of his head and looked quizzically at Moran.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Ain't there a law ag'in callin' men to their own door at night and shootin' 'em down?"

"But—but if Conley shot at him?" spluttered Moran.

"Jimmy ain't claimed that he did, has he?"

Moran turned to his son.

"He did, didn't he, Jimmy?" anxiously.

"No," replied Jimmy wearily. "He didn't even see me."

"Don't be a fool," growled Regan angrily.

"That's enough," said Roaring firmly. "The doctor don't need you, and I'm sure I don't, so you might as well go home. C'mon, Jimmy."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy knew nothing about the shooting until the next morning, when they found Roaring Rigby and several men in the restaurant, eating breakfast. The Black Horse had had a big play, and two of the dealers, Mack Ort and Keno Smiley, were eating breakfast before going to bed. Lovely Lucas was there, still half-drunk and inclined to be a bit belligerent.

As Hashknife and Sleepy came in, Lovely was at the height of an impassioned defense of Jimmy Moran. It did

not take long for Hashknife and Sleepy to gather the gist of what had happened at the Hot Creek ranch. Ort and Smiley eyed Hashknife coldly, and it was evident to him that English Ed had told them who he was.

"I been wonderin' where you boys were," said Roaring. He turned to Lovely Lucas. "If you don't shut up, I'll put you in jail, Lucas," he declared.

"By golly, I'll be with honest men, if you do. Jimmy Moran never shot Old Man Conley. Why, I tell you, he was aimin' to marry Dawn Conley. He wouldn't shoot his father-in-law."

"A-a-aw, what can you do?" wailed Roaring. "To hell with this kind of a job! Business is too good. Set down, boys. I'm glad there's somebody around here that ain't got no opinion. Ask me all the questions you like, but don't offer any advice."

"This is a free country, ain't it?" demanded Lovely. "I ask you if it ain't. You can't put a man in jail for talkin', can you, Roarin'? You can't—"

"Men have been put in the graveyard for talkin'," said Roaring seriously.

"Is that so? Huh!" Lovely got to his feet. "I'm goin' home and tell Horse-Collar Fields about Jimmy. Horse-Collar gits some awful good ideas. Jimmy's our boss, you know. Oh, I'll be back, Roarin'. All hell can't stop me, I'll tell you that."

Lovely went weaving toward the door, slammed it behind him and headed for the hitch-rack. Ort and Smiley paid for their breakfast and went out. Sleepy grinned widely. He could understand Lovely Lucas.

"Just what happened out there last night?" asked Hashknife.

Roaring placed his knife and fork carefully on his plate and told Hashknife just what he knew about it. Roaring wasn't sure about the two shots being fired, but he thought that he had heard two. He was riding pretty fast; but there was no doubt that two shots had been fired. Jimmy admitted that there had been, and Dawn spoke of the two shots.

"Jimmy was a fool," declared Roaring. "He knew what would happen."

"You say Jimmy threw somethin' against the window to attract Conley, and then called to Conley, telling him that it was Jimmy Moran outside?"

"That's what Dawn said; Jimmy didn't deny it."

"And when Conley came to the door he took a shot at Jimmy and Jimmy shot him."

"Looks thataway. Conley must have shot first. I don't think he could have fired after Jimmy shot him, unless he happened to have the gun cocked and it went off as he was fallin'."

"How long was it between the shots?"

"I dunno how long; I didn't ask. I'm goin' out there in a little while. Why don't you ride out with me?"

Sleepy groaned when Hashknife assented.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Roaring.

"Somethin' you can't prescribe for," grunted Sleepy.

"He groans thataway often," said Hashknife seriously. "It sounds like he was in pain, but he ain't; it's a joy-groan."

ANYWAY, Sleepy went along. They found Franklyn Moran, Slim Regan, Kent Cutter and Henry Miller on the porch. The doctor was still there. He had been there all night.

These four men had been waiting for him to report Conley's condition, which he did shortly after the others arrived. Conley was still alive, but unconscious. And that was about all there was to report; so the men from the Big 4 and the 7AL went to town.

Dawn heard Roaring talking with the doctor and she came out to the porch. It was the first time Hashknife and Sleepy had seen her. She had spent a sleepless night, but in spite of that she was a very pretty girl. Roaring introduced them, and left her with Hashknife and Sleepy while he went in to see the patient.

"You weren't out here last night, were you?" she asked.

Hashknife shook his head.

"We're strangers, Miss Conley."

"I know. I heard your name mentioned. Mr. Moran and Mr. Cutter were talking about you a while ago."

"That so?" smiled Hashknife. "What about?"

"I just heard a little of it. Cutter said he heard you were a cattle detective. Moran said he didn't know anything about you. Regan laughed and said you accused English Ed Holmes of being a former bootlegger to the Indians."

"That last part is true enough," nodded Hashknife. "Do you know Holmes very well?"

"Not very well."

"His outfit is responsible for your brother bein' in jail, I understand."

"They cheated Peter," she said quickly.

"Yeah, I know. Miss Conley, what is your honest opinion of what happened last night? Did Jimmy Moran shoot your father?"

Dawn turned and walked to the railing of the porch; she leaned a shoulder against a post.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," said Hashknife kindly.

"Oh, I know," she said softly. "I don't want to answer that question."

"All right, this one is different. Did you hear two shots?"

"Yes."

"How far apart?"

"Possibly—oh, I don't know."

"Right together?"

"Oh, no. There was one shot just after Dad opened the door. I—I think I ran almost across the room before the other one was fired."

"Did your father shoot the first one?"

"I don't know. Just after the last shot was fired I got to the door, and there stood Jimmy with a gun in his hand. And then Roaring Rigby was on the porch, taking Jimmy's gun away from him."

"Uh-huh. What did Jimmy say?"

"He said he didn't know what happened."

"Didn't know, eh?"

"And then they brought Dad into the house. Roaring looked at Jimmy's gun and asked me what happened. I told about the two shots being fired, and Jimmy said he shot one of them. He said he shot at somebody."

"Admitted shooting, eh? Miss Conley, is there any reason for Jimmy to have shot your father?"

Dawn turned from the post and came back to Hashknife.

"Dad told him to keep away," she said wearily. "He hates Jimmy's father."

"I know. You heard Jimmy call to your father and tell him who was out there?"

"Yes, I think Jimmy threw some gravel against the window to attract us. Then when Dad asked who it was, Jimmy told him."

"Was your father mad when he went to the door?"

Dawn flushed a little.

"I think he was, Mr. Hartley. He was expecting the sheriff to come out here."

"Was he goin' to shoot the sheriff?"

"Oh, no; they were just going to talk things over. You heard about the dead steers, didn't you?"

"Saw 'em; I was with Moran when the Big 4 found that the brands had been skinned out."

"The Big 4 did that themselves."

"Skinned out the brands?"

"No, cut the fence and killed their own steers. They hate Dad for fencing in Hot Creek, and they want to ruin him."

"Moran wants to buy this place, don't he?"

"Yes, he has made Dad a good offer. The 7AL wants it, too."

"Yeah? That's Cutter's outfit, ain't it?"

"Yes, but Dad won't sell to the Big 4."

"I see. Miss Conley, I'm goin' to get personal."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm goin' to ask questions that you might not care to answer; but I want you to understand that it ain't because I want to embarrass you in any way. Did Ed Holmes ever come to see you?"

Dawn flushed, but smiled at Hashknife.

"Once, I think. I wasn't home."

"Any of the Big 4 boys?"

"I should say not!" said Dawn emphatically.

"Cutter?"

Dawn smiled.

"Oh, he has been out here. Perhaps he came to see me."

"The sheriff?"

Dawn sobered quickly and glanced toward the closed door.

"You don't need to answer that," said Hashknife softly. "He's all right."

"Yes; he's all right," said Dawn. "But what's the use of these questions, Mr. Hartley?"

"Were there any others?" queried Hashknife. "Honest, I want to know."

Dawn bit her lip reflectively.

"Well, there was Jeff Ryker."

"The prosecuting attorney?"

"Yes."

"Since your brother has been in jail?"

"Yes."

Hashknife took a deep breath and his wide lips twisted in a faint smile. Ryker was the man with the big collar and the celluloid cuffs.

"Did you talk with him?" he asked.

Dawn shook her head quickly.

"I stayed in the house," she smiled. "He talked to my mother."

"And you heard what he said?"

"Some of it."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife took a deep breath. "Did he say anything about—uh—goin' easy on your brother?"

Dawn flashed Hashknife a quick glance of interrogation.

"How did you know that?" she asked wonderingly.

"Guessed it. He could go easy at the trial, you know, and he might make promises to your mother. Does your father like him?"

"No, I don't think he does. Dad doesn't like many folks."

"Is the judge a friend of your father?"

"Judge Beal—I think Dad likes him."

"Miss Conley, how long has the Big 4 been tryin' to buy your dad out?"

"For about two years."

"Ever since he fenced Hot Creek?"

"Yes."

"How long has the 7AL wanted it?"

Dawn frowned thoughtfully.

"Oh, I think it was about three or four months ago that Mr. Cutter made his first offer. After that Jeff Ryker came out and talked with Dad about selling out."

"What did Ryker want with it?"

"He was trying to buy it for Cutter."

"Oh, I see; he was Cutter's agent."

Roaring and the doctor came from the living-room.

"You better lie down awhile and get some sleep, Miss Conley," said the old doctor kindly. "There isn't anything you can do. The sheriff is going to send some of my things out for me; so I'll stay on the job."

"Didja get the bullet?" asked Hashknife.

"It went all the way through," said Roaring. He took the bullet from his pocket and gave it to Hashknife. "We found it on the floor in there."

The piece of lead was slightly battered, but not too much so to prove the caliber.

"Forty-five," said Hashknife.

Roaring nodded and put the bullet back in his pocket.

"We're goin' back, Dawn," he said. "Is there anythin' you need out here? No, don't bother about it now. I'll send Wind River Jim out with the doctor's stuff, and he can find out what you need."

"That's mighty nice of you," said Dawn.

"Pshaw!" Roaring cuffed his hat over one ear. "I wish I knowed what to do. Tomorrow is Sunday and the next day court starts. I dunno what cases are ahead of Pete's. Your dad never hired no lawyer for Pete, did he? Thought he didn't. I'll have a talk with the judge. He'll know what to do. Well, so long."

Hashknife held out his hand to Dawn; she shook hands with him.

FOR a long while after the men had left the ranch Dawn wondered why Hashknife had asked all those questions. Why would an absolute stranger quiz her like that, she wondered? What was behind those level gray eyes, and that smile that seemed to drive her sorrows away for a moment? She was so sleepy and weary that she could hardly remember just what he looked like; but she remembered his eyes. And he seemed just an ordinary cowboy; the other man seemed to be one continuous grin and blue eyes.

Her mother, wearied from the all-night vigil, came out to her on the porch and they sat down together.

"Mose pretty bad hurt," she said dully. "He talk long time ago. Long time ago he friend to Frank Moran."

"I know," said Dawn.

"Two strange men come," said Mrs. Conley.

"With the sheriff," said Dawn.

"What they want?"

Dawn shook her head slowly.

"I don't know, mother. I think they want to find out who shot Dad."

"Easy find out, Dawn. Everybody know."

"I suppose."

"Funny life," said the old Indian woman. "Frank Moran hate Mose Conley; Mose Conley hate Frank Moran. Now both have son in jail for same thing."

"I told that man what Ryker said to you, mother?"

Mrs. Conley looked curiously at Dawn.

"I told him that Ryker came to see me and talked with you," said Dawn. "This man knew what Ryker said."

"You tell him what Ryker say about turn Pete loose if you marry him?"

"I didn't tell him all about it; he seemed to know."

"Ryker tell him, Dawn?"

"No."

Dawn got to her feet and looked down the road. Some one was riding up along the road. It was Ryker. Dawn knew who it was as soon as she saw him, even at that distance.

"Ryker is coming now," she said. "I won't talk to him."

"I talk to him," said her mother, and Dawn went into the house.

The prosecuting attorney guided his horse up to the porch and smiled a greeting to Mrs. Conley, who gave a short nod of her head in acknowledgment. He dismounted and came to the corner of the porch. Perhaps he wasn't exactly sure of his reception.

"I heard about the trouble," he told her.

"Pretty damn bad," she said inelegantly.

Ryker mopped his brow with a clean handkerchief and came up on the porch.

"Met the sheriff and two men," he said jerkily. "Out here, wasn't they?"

Mrs. Conley nodded. Ryker cleared his throat harshly.

"I thought so. Know who those two men are?"

"Pretty smart," she said. "Tall man tell Dawn what you tell me."

"Eh?" Ryker blinked rapidly. "What do you mean?"

"Tall man tell Dawn you turn Peter loose if she marry you."

"The tall man said!" Ryker stopped, staring at her. "Who told you this, Mrs. Conley?"

"Dawn tell me."

"Who told the tall man?"

"Nobody."

Ryker scowled heavily at the Indian woman.

"You told him," he declared.

"You lie. I never talk to man."

"You told Dawn and she told him."

" 'Nother lie. He tell Dawn. Pretty damn smart."

"Too damn smart," growled Ryker. "What did Dawn say when you told her?"

"I can answer that, Mr. Ryker."

The prosecuting attorney turned quickly to see Dawn in the doorway.

"Why!" he began breathlessly.

"I heard what was said," continued Dawn. "The other time you were here I

heard what you said, Mr. Ryker. Are you the law?"

"The law?" faltered Ryker.

"Yes, the law. They say Peter may hang for the murder of Mallette. Can you trade Peter's life for a marriage? Is that what the law is for—trade goods?"

Ryker flushed angrily.

"You don't understand," he said huskily. "It isn't a case of trading, Dawn. I—I want you."

"And I don't want you," she said evenly. "Go home."

"Oh, all right," Ryker turned angrily and walked to his horse. He started to get on, but hesitated and turned to Dawn. "I suppose you know your father hasn't hired a lawyer to defend Pete. The trial starts Monday."

He mounted and rode away, cursing his own luck and wondering how Hashknife Hartley knew about the proposition he had made to Mrs. Conley. English Ed had said that Hartley was a dangerous man, and Ryker was inclined to believe him.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy rode back to Turquoise City with the sheriff. They had not met Ryker, for the simple reason that Ryker had seen them coming and had avoided the meeting. They went to the sheriff's office, where several men had gathered with Wind River Jim, waiting for word of Conley's condition. They went away after the sheriff had reported no change in the patient, and the four men sat down in the office.

"Pete and Jimmy shore ain't lost no appetite," laughed Wind River. "I shore packed plenty ham and eggs."

"What did Pete say about his father?" asked Roaring.

"He didn't say much. I saw Judge Beal this mornin'. He was cold sober, too. Looked awful white and was kinda shaky, but he stopped long enough to ask about things. He ain't been out of his own house for several days, and I'll bet he's been on a big drunk."

"Gettin' ready for the openin' of court," said Roaring.

"What's your private opinion of those warnings?" asked Hashknife.

"Search me. They scared Jim Randall out of his job. They sent the old judge two. The last one was the day before Mallette was killed. Mebby it was the same day. Anyway, it was their final warnin'—and the judge ignored it."

"And he's still alive," smiled Hashknife. "It proves that the gang are four-flushers."

"Yeah, it looks that way," admitted Roaring. "But he's been stayin' in the house pretty close."

LOVELY LUCAS was as good as his word. He came back to Turquoise City with Horse-Collar Fields, who came willingly. It was not often that Horse-Collar left the Stumbling K. He was a small, thin person, about fifty years of age, as bald as the proverbial billiard-ball. He had a slight cast in his left eye. He did the cooking for the Stumbling K.

Just now he wore a pair of misfit chaps. They belonged to Wind River Jim, whose waist measure was several inches larger than that which Horse-Collar boasted. He also wore a cartridge-belt and a holstered gun. Lovely led the way to the Ranger Saloon, with Horse-Collar swaggering along behind him.

"Hello, Horse-Collar," grinned the bartender, a short, fat person, with a moon-like face and a damp curl of hair gracing his expansive brow.

"Boy, howdy," said Horse-Collar seriously. "How's chances to git drunk?"

"Best you ever seen. Ain't seen you in a long time."

"No, and you wouldn't see me now, if it wasn't that I'm needed here. Cities don't appeal to me. I jist feel all cramped up in a city. What'll you have, Lovely?"

"Some of that there corrosive sublimate which is designated as liquor. But before we salivate our lungs, liver and lights, I want to explain to you ag'in, for about the seventh time, Horse-Collar—we ain't goin' to git drunk."

"And for seven times I replies to same," said Horse-Collar. "When I takes

the law in my two hands, Im goin' to have m' stummick in shape to handle m' brains. Gimme that bottle!"

"You takin' the law?" asked the bartender.

Horse-Collar cocked one eye wisely, as he poured out a big drink.

"Right by the slack of the pants," he declared. "They've got Jimmy Moran in jail, ain't they? Here's how. Well, well, well! 'F here ain't one of them officers of the law!"

Wind River Jim had come in and was standing near the bar, considering them gravely.

"What about Jimmy Moran bein' in jail?" asked Wind River.

"That's what we're here to find out," grunted Lovely.

"Grab a glass," invited Horse-Collar. "I'm purchasin'."

"I hadn't ort to," said Wind River sadly. "I'm deputy sheriff, you know."

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, I might gargle one with you, boys."

But they didn't stop at one drink. Lovely bought the next one, the bartender stood a treat and then it was Wind River's turn. By this time Horse-Collar was in the right mood to buy again, which caused the others to treat in turn. Eight drinks of Ranger whisky were guaranteed to either bring out all the latent forces within a human being, or to put him flat on his back.

Horse-Collar surveyed the world through rose-colored glasses; he essayed a song.

"Don't shing," advised Lovely.

"Tha's the worsht of friends," sighed Horse-Collar. "They try to run your business. What'll you do if I try to shing?"

"I'm shorry, but if you shing I mus' has'en your demise. Know what a demise is, Horsh-Collar? Tha's the end of you."

"Whish end?"

"Now, don' drink no more, Horsh-Collar. Ain't that verdict, Wind River? Horsh-Collar mus' not drink no more. We've got p'tic'lar work to do. Win' River's goin' help us, Horsh-Collar. We're goin' down and de-man' releash of Jimmy. Whoo-ee-e-e!"

Lovely cuffed his hat off his head and laughed deliriously.

"Thish is a lovely day," he declared. "Win' River Jim, yo're triplets! H'rah, f'r your fambly. Let's go up to the s'preme palace of vice and visit our old friend English Ed."

"He—he'll mashacree you," choked Wind River.

Horse-Collar shook his head so violently that he fell against the bar and sat down heavily on the bar-rail.

"Havin' a chill?" queried Lovely. "My Lord, you shore can shake. Havin' fits, Horsh-Collar?"

"Ain't nobody goin' mashacree nobody," declared Horse-Collar. "Let's go and fin' Jimmy. Poor old Jimmy. Oh, poor old Jimmy!"

"Can yuh beat that?" demanded Lovely. "Cryin'!"

"Git up," begged Wind River. "You make me shick. Let's have one more drink, and then we'll go down and have it out with Roarin' Rigby. C'mon, Horsh-Collar. A-a-a-aw, dry up!"

"You fellers start monkeyin' with the law, and you'll get hurt," said the bartender.

"Will, eh?" grunted Wind River. "Well, I'm about half of the law around here, and I know what I can do."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy came from the restaurant near the Black Horse Saloon and saw Franklyn Moran and English Ed, sitting together in a buggy, the team of which was tied to the Black Horse hitch-rack.

Moran called to Hashknife, who went over to them. Sleepy sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and rolled a smoke.

"You've met Holmes, haven't you, Hartley?" asked Moran.

Hashknife nodded quickly. Holmes laughed shortly.

"Yes, we've met before, Moran. Hartley recognized me. He's got a good memory, it seems."

Hashknife studied the gambler. It seemed rather odd that the man was admitting all this, and Hashknife wondered what his reason might be.

"I'm putting my cards on the table, Hartley," said Holmes. "I knew you. At first you had me puzzled, but I remembered."

"And then what?" asked Hashknife coldly.

"I've been telling Moran about you, Hartley. I've got nothing to conceal. I'm just as anxious to have things cleared up as he is. You heard about the warnings sent to Jim Randall and Judge Beal? Well, I didn't send 'em."

"No?" Hashknife smiled curiously. "Why tell me, Holmes?"

"Because I know you are not here for your health."

"That's true; my health never worries me."

English Ed shook his head.

"Still suspicious, eh? Don't blame you. Do you believe Jimmy Moran shot Moses Conley?"

"Don't you?"

"I'd like your opinion."

"Haven't any. None of my business, Holmes. Must have been enough evidence to satisfy the sheriff."

"It's not hard to satisfy a sheriff," said Moran slowly. "Holmes tells me that you have cleared up a lot of hard cases, Hartley. I didn't know I was hiring a horse from a detective when I met you at Sibley Junction. I hired your horse and now I'd like to hire you. How about it?"

"I'm more or less of a cowpuncher," said Hashknife. "I'm not a detective, Moran. Never pretended to be one."

"Will you take this case?"

"What case?"

"Jimmy's case."

"Oh, yeah, Jimmy's case. You mean—to try and prove he didn't shoot Conley?"

"If it's possible—yes, I'll pay well."

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"You've got the wrong dope on me, Moran. My skin is worth quite a lot to me. Even if I was able to solve a mystery, I'd have no chance here. Somebody would fill me full of lead before I got started."

English Ed laughed shortly.

"Which proves that you don't think Jimmy is guilty. If he was, why would you be afraid of getting shot?"

Hashknife shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think Jimmy killed those Big 4 steers at Hot Creek, do you?"

"I don't know anything about it," said Holmes flatly.

"Somebody does," smiled Hashknife. "Nope, I don't want any finger in this pie; I might get it hurt."

He nodded and turned back to Sleepy, who joined him. They saw Wind River Jim, Lovely Lucas and Horse-Collar Fields coming from the Ranger Saloon, and the sidewalk was not wide enough for them to walk in single file.

"What did they want?" asked Sleepy.

"Wanted me to clear Jimmy Moran. English Ed had filled Moran up with a lot of stuff. I wouldn't trust Holmes as far as I could throw a prize bull by the tail."

"You didn't take the case, did you, Hashknife?"

"Not so much you'd notice it."

"Boy, howdy! Now we can high-tail out of here, eh?"

"Mm-m-m-m. Let's go down and see how Roarin' is gettin' along."

They found Roaring Rigby sitting on the edge of the cot that he had moved into the office. His eyes were blurred with sleep, but he grinned a welcome.

"Took a little shut-eye," he said. "Fixed me up pretty good, too. Ho-o-o-o-hum-m-m-m-m! Gosh, I shore was sleepy! What's new in the world?"

"Nothin' much," replied Hashknife. "Roarin', what kind of a gun did Jimmy Moran use?"

Roaring yawned heavily.

"Colt. I've got it here."

He went to his desk, sat down heavily and opened one of the drawers. There were three guns in the drawer, and he placed them side by side on the desk-top.

"This is Jimmy's," he said. "The middle one belongs to Moses Conley and

the other is the one Pete killed Mallette with."

Hashknife examined Jimmy's gun. The hammer was still down on the exploded shell. It was a .45 caliber. He picked up Pete's gun, a .45, single-action Colt. It was fully loaded and fairly clean.

"He had plenty of time to reload and clean it," said the sheriff.

Hashknife nodded and put the gun back on the desk.

"There wasn't any bullet in Mallette, eh?"

"Nope; went plumb through."

Hashknife picked up Moses Conley's gun. It was of the same model as Pete's. There was an empty shell in one of the chambers. Hashknife slid it out and looked it over. Some one was coming down the sidewalk toward the office. Hashknife replaced the shell. He was half sitting on a corner of the desk.

Roaring Rigby was rolling a cigaret and Sleepy was busily examining a reward notice. Some one stopped at the open door, but Hashknife didn't look up. His long fingers gripped the heavy revolver, a thumb drew back the hammer almost to full cock and let it slip.

Wham!

The big gun roared like a cannon in that small room. Hashknife had the muzzle pointed at the floor and, as the gun jerked in his hands, he glanced toward the door in time to see Wind River Jim, Lovely Lucas and Horse-Collar Fields.

Wham!

Horse-Collar Fields had yanked out his gun and fired so quickly that the report of his gun was a thudding echo of Hashknife's shot.

Wham!

Lovely Lucas' gun went off before it was out of the holster.

"You-u-u-u-u-u-u damn fools!" howled Roaring. He went over backward, clawing at his face.

Hashknife sprang sidewise, collided with Sleepy, and they went sprawling together, while the three drunken cowpunchers backed out, fell off the sidewalk and proceeded to empty their guns at anything and everything in sight. Hashknife and Sleepy sat up, staring at each other, while Roaring crawled to his feet and peeked over the top of his upset chair.

"My Lord!" exploded Sleepy. "Where'd the nigger come from?"

Roaring's face, except for the tip-end of his nose, was as black as ebony. He spat disgustedly and wiped the back of a hand across his lips.

"Ink!" he snorted. "Damn fool busted the ink-bottle and I got it all in the face. What in the devil is goin' on around here, anyway?"

Wham!

A bullet came through the window and splatted against the end of the room.

"Shoot at me, will you?" It was Horse-Collar's voice, filled with righteous indignation. "Show yourself, you murderer! Give 'em hell if they rush you, Wind River!"

Roaring wiped some more ink off his face and got to his feet.

"Don't go near the door," advised Hashknife.

"I'm not goin' to. What started this here war?"

Hashknife grinned sheepishly.

"Mebby I'm to blame. I accidentally fired this gun, and them three men must have thought I was shootin' at them."

"Hunh!" grunted Roaring disgustedly.

"One was Lovely Lucas," grinned Sleepy. "He said he was goin' to get help and come back, didn't he? Wasn't he goin' to get a jigger named Horse-Collar?"

"That's right! Why, the dirty bum! And they've got my deputy along with 'em. See if you can find out where they are, Sleepy."

"Is that so!" snorted Sleepy. "Take a look and grab a harp. Not me, brother."

"Hunh! Well, they won't shoot at me, I'll betcha."

Roaring strode over to the doorway, ducked convulsively when a bullet thudded into the wall behind him, and whirled in against the wall.

"I lose," he said quickly.

The shooting had caused considerable excitement in the main street, but none of the three men went to the door until Hank Pitts, of the Big 4, came down to the doorway as a committee of one to find out what caused it.

"They're over in the Ranger Saloon," he told Roaring. "Anybody—my Lord, you shore got painted! Ink?"

"Ink! Nobody got hurt. Hartley accidentally fired Moses Conley's gun, and them drunken fools thought we were shootin' at them. Got a darn good notion to jail all three of 'em."

"I wouldn't; they're drunk," laughed Hashknife. "Nobody hurt."

"I suppose that's right. The darn fools might have killed somebody. Hank, if you see Wind River, will you tell him to sober up and get back on the job?"

Hank promised and went back to the Black Horse. Hashknife examined the shell he had fired, and a faint smile twisted his wide lips. He handed the gun back to Roaring, who was scrubbing his face with a handkerchief, trying to remove the ink, which had already dried in.

"Put that gun in a safe place, will you?" asked Hashknife.

"You're right I will!" spluttered Roaring. "How'd you ever come to fire it thataway?"

"Slipped," grinned Hashknife. "Mind if I talk with Jimmy Moran?"

"I reckon not. I'll bet they're wonderin' what all the shootin' was about."

They opened the jail door and went in. Pete was frightened. He thought there had been an attempt to take him from the jail. Jimmy laughed joyfully at Roaring's description of how Lovely and Horse-Collar and Wind River had got drunk and had come down to get him out of jail.

"They're a wild bunch," laughed Jimmy. "All heart and no brains."

"I want you to tell me about Conley's shootin'," said Hashknife. "I've got Miss Conley's story."

"What's the idea?" asked Jimmy cautiously.

"Just curious, Jimmy. Tell me about it."

And Jimmy told him everything as he had seen it.

"You shot at a man, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"There was somebody behind that bush," declared Jimmy. "I was kinda excited, you see. No, I didn't see where the shot came from; I was too far around the corner. But I didn't see anybody after I shot."

Hashknife continued to question—

"Was there more than two shots fired?"

"That's all, and I fired one of 'em."

"You went out there to warn Conley that the Big 4 outfit were comin' out, didn't you?"

Jimmy nodded quickly.

"What else could I do?"

"Did you skin out them brands, Jimmy?"

Jimmy shifted his eyes and a ghost of a smile passed his lips.

"You're just guessin', Hartley," he said.

Hashknife smiled.

"Good guesser?" he asked.

"Mebby you think you are."

"By golly, I never thought of that!" exploded Roaring.

"I'm just tryin' to help you, Jimmy," reminded Hashknife.

"I need little help," said Pete.

Hashknife turned his head and looked at the half-breed. Pete was leaning against the bars, a wistful expression in his dark eyes.

"I reckon you do," agreed Hashknife.

"Pete ain't even got a lawyer," said Roaring.

"Don't need none," said Pete quickly. "Damn lawyer don't know who kill Joe Mallette."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"That's very true, Pete."

They left the jail and, while Roaring went on a hunt for Wind River Jim and his two wild-shooting companions, Hashknife and Sleepy got their horses and rode out of town, heading toward Hot Creek.

QUITE a crowd collected in the Ranger Saloon, trying to get a first-hand account of the gun battle, and they got it in three distinct versions.

"They repulsed us," said Horse-Collar dismally. "Oh, the loss was terrific. There was bodies stewed—strewed all over the street. In one plash—jus' in one plash, mind you—I shaw twelve dead men in one pile. An' if that ain't the truth, you can cut off Lovely's ears."

"Whozears?" demanded Lovely. "Horsh-Collar's a liar. That long-geared Hartley shot d'liber'tly at my heart; that's what happened. Jus' lifted his six-shooter and shez t' me, 'I've gotcha faded, Misser Lucas.' Jus' like that. And then he pulled the trigger. It was the meanesht thing I ever beheld. That feller's a murderer—jus' a common murderer."

"A-a-a-a-aw, hell!" snorted Wind River. "You and Horsh-Collar are drunk. Here's what act'ally happened, gents. Me and Lovely and Horsh-Collar went down to pay our reshpects to Roarin' Rigby. We was jus' as innochent as a unborn sheep—three of 'em. Hartley and Stevens was there with Roarin', you shee. Well, they mus' 'a' thought we was makin' an attack, because they armed themshelves with Winchester rifles, you shee. And when we came in, p'lite as hell, and shed good-afternoon, they opened fire on us, jus' like that. *Bing! Bang! Boom! Bim!*"

Wind River struck the bar three times, emphasizing his vocal imitation of a shot, but the fourth time he missed the bar and hit his chin on the edge of it.

"They must be drunk," declared the bartender, grinning.

"I'll shay they are," agreed Horse-Collar.

"Didja kill any of 'em?" asked Hank Pitts.

"All five," said Horse-Collar solemnly. "Let's all have a drink. My conscience bothers me. It's the firsh time I ever missed a shot. Gittin' old. Any old time I have to take three shots to kill two men, I'm all wrong, Whatcha drinkin'?"

It was about ten minutes later when Roaring Rigby came into the Ranger Saloon. He leaned against the bar and looked sadly at Wind River Jim, who goggled at him owlishly.

"H'lo corpsh," said Wind River.

"Go stick your head in a horse-trough," advised Roaring. "Drown some of the liquor out of you and then go back to the office where you belong. You're a hell of a deputy!"

"Deputy?" Wind River's eyes opened widely. He turned and hit Horse-Collar a resounding whack between the shoulders, the force of the blow knocking Horse-Collar against the bar, from which he rebounded and sat down on the floor.

"You quit knockin' Horsh-Collar 'round," ordered Lovely. "Who do you think you are, anyway. Git up and pile him, Horsh-Collar. Don't let 'm knock you 'round, the big bully."

"Who in the devil got hit?" wailed Horse-Collar in a thin voice. "Lemme alone, will you, Lovely? Keep your nose out of my business, will yu-u-u-uh? 'F I want to pile Wind River, I don't need no advice from you. Gittin' so a man can't even git knocked down, without somebody advisin' him."

"Give 'm hell!" grunted Wind River. " 'S' all right, Roarin'. I'm shober."

Wind River cuffed his wide hat almost over his eyes, got his bearings and headed out through the doorway.

"Have a li'l drink, Roarin'?" asked Lovely.

"You boys better go home, Lovely."

"Tha' so? Huh! Whaffor? Nothin' to do. We ain't goin' home until—whatcha shay, Horsh-Collar?"

"Drunken idiots," said Roaring, and he went out.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy circled the Hot Creek ranch fence to where the wire had been cut at the north side and then they came down to the coulee where the Big 4 steers had been killed. Luckily they had been killed far enough away so as not to pollute the water. A coyote sneaked away from one of them, and a flock of magpies went chattering

into the trees. Nature's scavengers were swiftly obliterating the Big 4 losses.

Hashknife examined one of the steers. It had been shot in the head.

"Funny they didn't hear the shootin' down at Conley's," said Sleepy.

"A twenty-two don't make much noise, Sleepy."

"F'r gosh sake! No wonder. Probably used longs; them little guns are beef killers. Looks as though the killers didn't want to be heard, eh?"

"Looks thataway," agreed Hashknife, mounting his horse. "Let's ride down and see how Conley is feelin'."

The doctor had gone to town a short time before they arrived. Conley was conscious, but the doctor had left orders with Dawn that he was to see no one. She came outside to talk with them.

"What did he have to say?" asked Hashknife. "Did he know who shot him?"

Dawn nodded, her eyes filled quickly with tears.

"Jimmy, eh?" said Hashknife softly.

"Yes. The doctor wouldn't let him talk much."

"Of course not; but the doctor thinks he'll get well, don't he?"

"He thinks Dad has a good chance now."

"Well, that's great."

Hashknife sat down on the steps and rolled a smoke.

"Is there much deer huntin' around here in the fall?" he asked.

"Not very close," said Dawn. "The boys go back about fifteen miles. They get quite a lot."

"Plenty grouse, eh?"

"Quite a few; Peter kills lots of them."

"It's a lot of fun, if you've got a shotgun," said Hashknife.

"Peter uses a twenty-two rifle," said Dawn.

"Uh-huh." Hashknife did not look at Sleepy. He had found out that the Conley family owned a .22.

They did not stay long. Mrs. Conley was sleeping, and Hashknife realized that Dawn wanted to be with her father.

"How much longer are we goin' to stick around here?" asked Sleepy, as they rode back toward Turquoise City.

"Not long, I reckon. It kinda looks as though the Conley family killed those steers."

"Well, that's what everybody else thinks; so why not you?"

"I hoped they hadn't, Sleepy, that's all."

"As far as ownin' a twenty-two is concerned—there must be more twenty-twos in this country."

Hashknife grinned at Sleepy.

"You do have an idea once in a while, cowboy. But how much easier it would have been if Conley didn't."

"I suppose it would. But what do we care? Let's figure on pullin' out tomorrow."

Hashknife frowned thoughtfully. There were still things that puzzled him greatly, and he hated to leave things unsolved. The jury would find Pete guilty, and he would be sentenced to hang; that was almost a certainty. If Conley died, Jimmy Moran might get off with a sentence. It would all depend on the jury, and a Black Horse jury would give Jimmy the benefit of a doubt.

But Jimmy wanted to marry Dawn Conley, and nothing except complete vindication would ever give him that chance. Hashknife did not believe English Ed Holmes. He had a feeling that Holmes merely wanted to know whether Hashknife was going to work on the case.

It was rather hard for Hashknife to believe that old Moses Conley had cut the fence, herded in those Big 4 steers and shot them down just for revenge. Revenge for what? For something that had happened twenty-five years before. That would be ridiculous presumption. No doubt Conley had fenced in Hot Creek against the Big 4; but that was no crime. He owned the land.

Had some of the Big 4 cut that fence and killed the steers merely to have a reason for starting trouble with Conley? Possible but hardly probable, he decided. Slim Regan was a hard-bitted

sort of person, but Hashknife could hardly believe that Slim would do that.

"You're doin' a lot of thinkin'," observed Sleepy.

"Am I?" grinned Hashknife. "It ain't doin' me much good. I'm kinda stuck."

"Glad to hear it. Mebby you'll quit."

"I might," grinned Hashknife.

About a mile out of Turquoise City they met the old doctor, heading back to the Conley place, driving his old sway-backed gray. The two cowboys drew rein beside the road, and the doctor stopped.

"Hyah, Doctor," smiled Hashknife. "Hear your patient is comin' along fine."

"Good enough," answered the doctor gruffly. "Didn't talk to him, did you?"

"The little lady wouldn't let me."

"Good for her. Smart girl; nice girl, too. Obeys orders. Feel sorry for her. Conley says Moran shot him. Lucky thing I'm pulling Conley out of it. Hate to see the kid strung up."

The old doctor talked jerkily.

"Conley didn't say he saw Moran, did he?"

"Didn't say; suppose he did. Kind of hot today."

"Little warm," agreed Hashknife. "You're the coroner, ain't you, Doc?"

"Yes, who's dead this time?"

Hashknife laughed and shook his head.

"Nothin' like that, Doc. You handled this Mallette, didn't you?"

"Naturally, bein' a murder case."

"Didn't find any bullet?"

"No; shot in the head; bullet went on. You're not trying to find out who killed him, are you?"

"Why not?"

"No question about Pete Conley, is there?"

"Might be, Doc. Tell me about how Mallette looked. Was he shot at close range?"

"Guess not. Not close enough to get burned. They said he had been drinking heavily. Drank absinth with his liquor. Darn bad combination. Wore cowboy boots. Funny thing about his boots. When I took them off I found a lot of gravel in them. I told the sheriff about it." The doctor laughed heartily. "He said Mallette wasn't very clean."

"Gravel in his boots, eh?" mused Hashknife. "Man would have to go without a bath a long time to acquire gravel."

"He would," laughed the doctor, picking up his lines. "I've got to be going on, boys."

They told him good-by and rode on. Hashknife's eyes were keen now and his lips shut tightly. Sleepy looked closely at him, groaned and yanked his hat down viciously.

SLEEPY and Hashknife stabled their horses and went to the sheriff's office, where they found Roaring and Wind River Jim. The deputy was asleep on the cot, sleeping off his jag.

"What do you know?" asked Roaring.

"Not very much," replied Hashknife. "I wish you'd take me to the spot where they found Joe Mallette."

"Yea-a-ah? What for, Hashknife?"

"Curiosity, I suppose."

"Uh-huh. Will you stay here, Sleepy? Got to keep somebody around here. Wind River ain't much use right now."

"Go ahead," laughed Sleepy.

Roaring led Hashknife through the alley between the Black Horse Saloon and the restaurant, out past the rear of the judge's home, to a spot between there and the end house of the redlight district.

"This is the spot," said Roaring. "I wasn't here that night, but several of the boys showed me the place."

Hashknife studied the spot for a while, while the sheriff watched him curiously.

"Mallette was drunk, wasn't he?" asked Hashknife.

"They say he was. Drank absinth. Some of the boys said they wondered how he was able to walk."

"Powerful stuff."

They walked part way back to the alley, where Hashknife stopped and looked back.

"Mallette came from the rear of the Black Horse Saloon," said Hashknife.

"He was headin' for them redlight houses and he was loaded with absinth and whisky. Uh-huh."

"That's the right dope on it, Hashknife. What have you got in your mind?"

"How long was it before Pete Conley went out on his trail?"

"Prob'ly not much more than five minutes."

"Long enough."

They walked back through the alley, where Hashknife excused himself and went over to a general merchandise store. He bought a box of cartridges for his revolver, and engaged the proprietor in conversation. Their selection of ammunition was limited to a few sizes. Hashknife noticed a few boxes of .22 caliber shells.

"Yuh don't sell many twenty-twos, do you?" he asked.

"Not many," grinned the proprietor. "Pretty small ammunition. Pete Conley used to buy quite a lot."

"Some places they're popular," observed Hashknife. "Is Pete the only twenty-two shooter around here?"

"Guess he is. Don't remember any others."

Hashknife bought some tobacco, and went out. It seemed to have narrowed down to the one twenty-two rifle. As he came from the store he met Kent Cutter, the boss of the 7AL. They nodded and went on. Cutter entered the store, singing out a greeting to the proprietor, who had seen Cutter and Hashknife exchange nods.

"Who is that tall cowboy?" asked the merchant.

"Name's Hartley. Came here with Frank Moran. Heard he's a cattle detective, but don't know anythin' about him myself."

"He's a level-eyed son-of-a-rooster."

"Sure is. Gimme a box of thirty-thirties, Al."

The merchant slid a box across the counter.

"This Hartley seemed to be interested in twenty-twos."

"In twenty-twos? Don't pack one, does he?"

"Bought forty-fives. Mentioned that I probably didn't sell many twenty-twos. I told him Pete Conley had the only twenty-two in this part of the country."

"Yeah, he's got one," said Cutter. "I need a pair of overalls, Al. Give 'em to me big enough. This cowboy idea of tight pants don't appeal to me. So he's interested in twenty-twos, is he? Pretty small gun for a grown man; me, I like a thirty-thirty."

Hashknife went back to the office and asked Roaring to let him speak a word with Pete Conley. Roaring was willing. Hashknife told Pete that his father was conscious, and the half-breed seemed pleased. Jimmy Moran danced a jig on the cell floor and wanted to know all the details.

"What did he say?" asked Jimmy anxiously. "Did he have any idea who shot him, Hashknife?"

"He said you did, Jimmy."

"My God!" Jimmy turned around and sat down.

"I want to ask you a question, Pete," said Hashknife.

"Sure."

"You've got a twenty-two rifle, Pete?"

"Sure," Pete grinned widely. "I got little gun. Pretty damn good gun, too."

"Fine. Who else in Black Horse valley has a twenty-two rifle?"

"Mm-m-m-m," Pete scratched his head thoughtfully. "By golly, I dunno. Nobody, I guess. I not know any one. You want use mine? You tell Dawn—"

"I don't want it, Pete—thanks."

"She shoot good."

"Yeah," sighed Hashknife.

"What about a twenty-two rifle?" asked Roaring.

"You don't know anybody who owns one, do you?"

"I don't; didn't even know Pete owned one."

"You're a lot of help to me," sighed Hashknife. "Much obliged to you, Pete."

They went back into the office and sat down. Hashknife knew that Roaring was itching to know; so he told him that the Big 4 steers had been killed with a twenty-two rifle.

"The hell!" exploded Roaring. "Do you know, I never even thought to see what had killed 'em? I'll betcha Mose Conley killed 'em with Pete's gun. Yes, sir, that's jist what happened."

"Why would he, Roaring?"

"Why would he? Why, the old man has hated the Big 4—"

"For twenty-five years—yeah."

"Well, mebby it was to show Frank Moran—"

"Conley didn't even know Frank Moran was comin'. That fence was cut. If Conley wanted to kill Big 4 steers for revenge, would he kill 'em down in that Hot Creek coulee, where the Big 4 couldn't find 'em? He'd have to take a chance that some puncher would find that cut fence, and investigate. If Conley wanted to make the Big 4 mad, he'd kill them steers inside the fence and near the road."

"Yeah, that's true. I never thought of that, Hartley. You kinda reason things out."

"And if Pete owned the only twenty-two in the country, do you suppose they'd kill them steers and then deny it? They did deny it, Roarin'. And if Conley killed 'em for revenge, would it be any revenge to deny it to the Big 4? It would not. He'd merely tell 'em to keep their stock off his ranch. And another thing, Roarin'; Moses Conley wouldn't wantonly butcher eight big, fat steers in that manner. He's an old cowman. He might kill a man, but I don't think he'd kill steers."

"Well, somebody did," said Roaring foolishly. "Mebby the Big 4 killed 'em themselves."

"Probably borrowed Pete's twenty-two," said Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. Anyway, I'm not interested in them steers. So old man Conley says Jimmy shot him, eh? That makes it tough for Jimmy; but old Frank Moran will shore hire a good lawyer for Jimmy. English Ed tells me that the old man paid Jimmy's gamblin' debt. English was down here a while ago. Asked about you. I told him I didn't know where you'd gone. He asked me if you was interested in Jimmy's case, and I said you prob'ly was. He said he heard that you took a shot at Horse-Collar Fields, and I told him what had happened. Ryker heard about it too, and he came down. You can't keep a lawyer's nose out of things. He asked quite a lot; but that's natural."

"He's a queer lookin' jigger," smiled Hashknife.

"He shore is," laughed Roaring. "Ryker is an old old-timer, Hashknife. He had that assay office for years. Knows minerals, y'betcha. But when the minin' boom died out and his business wasn't so much, he took to law. I reckon he had studied it before he came here. Knew quite a lot about minin' law. He's done pretty good. Got himself elected to office, and this is his third term. Makes me itch. I want to cinch up his collar. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! And them danged cuffs! Him and Judge Beal never got along. The old judge knows law, and the prosecutor never slips anythin' over on him. I heard old Ryker make the crack one day that he was aimin' to be judge of this county one of these days. Could, I reckon—if the voters would elect him."

"Was Jim Randall a good sheriff?" asked Hashknife.

"Best in the world! Why, Jim Randall would shoot a man as quick as he'd look at him. Good? I'll tell you he was."

Hashknife grinned to himself. That was Roaring Rigby's idea of an efficient officer.

"Strict, eh?"

"You're danged right. That's why they ran him out. He was a fighter in the open, but—but he had a wife and kids, Hartley. I don't blame him. If they ever send me a warnin', my own skin will be my only alibi for high-tailin' it out of here. I'd rather be a runnin' coward than a reclinin' hero."

"Somethin' to that, too," smiled Hashknife.

"Yeah, and you better think about it," said Sleepy.

SATURDAY night, as was usual in a cow-town, was a gala night in Turquoise City. Every cowboy in the country came to town, thirsty, full of song and

looking for excitement. Wind River had sobered and was repentant; but Horse-Collar Fields and Lovely Lucas were still having a wonderful time.

They had forgotten Jimmy Moran and their escapade at the sheriff's office; but they had never gone near the Black Horse Saloon. The Ranger was their happy hunting ground. Both of them had long since run out of money and were spending their credit with great prodigality.

"We s'licit your votes, gen'lemen," said Horse-Collar expansively. "Lovely's runnin' f'r gov'ner and I'm sheekin' nominashun for pup-president. Long may she wave. How's all your li'l' cowlets and bullets? Have a drink on the bartender; he ain't treated since Sittin' Bull stood up."

"Lemme 'lone;" pleaded Lovely, "Lemme 'tirely 'lone. I'm tryin' to think why I came to town."

"Tha's right; be intelligent, 'f you can. 'F that bartender would only think, he'd know it's his turn.

"O-o-o-oh, I feel as fresh as a big sunflower
That bends and nods in the bree-e-e-e-zus;
My heart's as light as a drop of dew
That lays in the road and free-e-e-e-zus."

"My word, what a shong!" exploded Lovely. "Lissen, mockin'-bird, I know what we came here for."

"I crave to know," said Horse-Collar seriously. "Yes sir, I almos' deman' to know. Don't keep me in shuspense."

"We came here to liberate Jimmy Moran."

"My God! We did? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! That was yesserday."

"That was t'day."

"My, my! Thasso? How time does fly. Was it only t'day that we had the battle? Don' tell me. Where's Wind River Jim?"

"Roarin' came and got him long time ago."

"Can that be possible? Ain't Roarin' Rigby dead? Ain't he? My, my, I mus' practise up. Shay! Let's me and you go down and c'ngratulate Roarin'. He's lucky. As shoon as the bartender dechides that it's his turn, we'll have one more li'l' snifter and then go down to shee Roarin'."

"I'd do that just to get you jiggers out of here," said the bartender. "But if you ask me, I'd tell you to go easy on Roarin' Rigby. He'll salivate both of you."

"Yesh, he will not!" snorted Horse-Collar. "He'll eat out of my good right hand, tha's what, eh, Lovely?"

"Oh, pos'tively; well, here's a stiff rope and a short drop, bartender. May you eat well on your last mornin'."

They took their drink, locked arms and tried to go through the narrow doorway, arm in arm. Failing in that, they went out sidewise and fell flat on the sidewalk.

"Thank heaven, they're out of here!" said the bartender. "They're the craziest pair of punchers I ever seen, and I've seen 'em all. Lie and prove it by each other. Owe me ten dollars apiece, and won't remember it. Well, I won't lose an awful lot. I filled up a half-empty bar-bottle with water, and they've drank it all; so I only lose fifty per-cent on 'em."

But they didn't find Roaring at the office. Hashknife was there, talking with Wind River Jim, and Horse-Collar looked him over rather dubiously. Lovely sat down on the floor against the wall and tried to roll a cigaret. Wind River Jim didn't feel very well.

"We came peacefully," declared Horse-collar. "Kinda like a fam'ly re-e-union, you shee."

"You don't feel so good, do you, Wind River?" asked Lovely, spilling the contents of his tobacco sack over his knees. "I think you've got stummick complaint."

"Ne' mind my stummick," growled Wind River.

"Don' mind his stummick," advised Horse-Collar Fields owlishly, and then to Hashknife he said—

"Wheresh Roarin' Rigby?"

"I dunno," grinned Hashknife.

"Ain't dead, is he?"

"He wasn't dead fifteen minutes ago."

"Then I mus' 'a' missed him," sadly. "Gittin' old."

"You're drunk," declared Wind River heavily.

"Thasso? Huh! Not a speck. Lemme tell you—"

From somewhere on the street came the sharp snap of a revolver shot. Hashknife stepped quickly to the door. There was nothing unusual about a revolver shot on the main street of Turquoise City, especially on a Saturday night.

The only lights on the street were from the windows of the saloons and business houses. Hashknife stepped outside, and Wind River Jim came to the doorway behind him.

Hashknife was looking toward the Black Horse Saloon, where there seemed to be considerable activity, and Wind River Jim stepped past him to the edge of the sidewalk, when a spurt of flame seemed to lash out at them from the alley between the office and a store building next door.

Almost before his ears registered the report of the gun, Hashknife felt the bullet sear the side of his neck, like the touch of a red-hot iron. Hashknife instinctively threw himself sidewise, drawing his gun. He heard Wind River drop to the sidewalk, but he thought that he merely did it for protection, never thinking that the bullet might have hit him.

He heard the scrape of running feet. He darted into the dark alley, regardless of the fact that he might be running into an ambush. He blundered around behind the store, falling over an old packing-box; finally he ended his run at the corner of the sheriff's little stable.

For several moments he remained silent, but he could hear nothing. He circled the rear of the store and came back to the street between the store and post-office, where he met Roaring Rigby.

"What was that shootin'?" asked Roaring.

"I don't know who it was," panted Hashknife. "They darned near got me. Burned me across the neck. I chased him down the alley but he got away. Didn't somebody fire a shot near the Black Horse Saloon?"

"Yeah—one shot. I can't find out who fired it."

"Foxy devils," said Hashknife. "That shot was to draw me out of your office, Roarin'. I bit on it."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exploded Roaring. "Could it have been Horse-Collar or Lovely?"

"No, they're both in the office. Let's go down there."

They went cautiously past the alley and entered the office. Wind River Jim was lying flat on his back in the middle of the office floor, his face bathed in gore. Around his neck was Lovely Lucas' blue silk muffler, tied loosely, and inside the loop of this was a long-barrel Colt revolver, which Horse-Collar Fields was twisting around and around, shutting off Wind River's breath entirely, while Lovely sat on Wind River's legs to keep him from jerking.

"You fools!" yelled Roaring.

He knocked Horse-Collar aside and untwisted the muffler as quickly as possible. Horse-Collar landed against the wall and stared at Roaring indignantly.

"What in the devil was you tryin' to do?" demanded Roaring.

"Turny-keet," wailed Horse-Collar. "Look at his head, you big bully! He's bleedin' to death."

"Firs' aid for the injured," grunted Lovely. "Look at him kick."

Hashknife flopped down in the old swivel chair and shook with laughter, while Horse-Collar and Lovely looked at him in amazement. Roaring didn't see the humor of the situation. He wiped some of the blood off Wind River's face and head; enough to discover that the bullet had merely cut a furrow, knocking Wind River cold.

"You can't stop bleedin' thataway," he told Horse-Collar.

"The devil you can't! I did, the time I got shot in the leg. Saved m' life, too, y'betcha."

"Who shot 'm?" demanded Lovely. "That's what I'd crave to know—who shot 'm?"

"That long legged geezer," said Horse-

Collar, pointing at Hashknife. "Shot 'im and then run. He's dangerous, I tell you. Didn't he shoot at me awhile ago? Put 'm in jail, Roarin'."

"Drunk and crazy!" snorted Roaring. "Take a look at this wound, will you, Hashknife? If you figger it's bad enough, I'll send out to Conley's place for the doctor."

Hashknife examined it closely and decided that Wind River would be all right in a few minutes.

"Get some water and wash his head," suggested Hashknife.

As Roaring started for the rear of the office, Slim Regan stepped into the office. Slim was panting from running, and he ignored the sight of Wind River Jim on the floor.

"Hartley," he panted. "Your pardner got hurt. They've got him in the Black Horse Saloon; you better come."

Hashknife was past Regan before the Big 4 foreman finished speaking. He ran heavily up the street and crossed to the saloon. The crowd parted to let him in. They had placed Sleepy on the floor near the center of the room, and the yellow light from the center lamp illuminated his white face. Hashknife dropped to his knees beside him, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Sleepy, do you know me?" he asked.

But Sleepy did not speak. He was breathing heavily. Hashknife could see the blood oozing through Sleepy's shirt. He had been shot through the body on the right side, about two inches above his waist-line.

"I sent Hank Pitts for the doctor," said Slim.

Hashknife looked up at Regan, his face twisted with pain.

"Thank you, Slim. Does anybody know how it happened?"

Slim shook his head.

"He was out by the hitch-rack. Hank Pitts almost stepped on him, Hartley. There was a shot fired out there awhile ago, but nobody investigated it."

"That was the shot I heard," muttered Hashknife. He got to his feet and stood fretfully looking down at Sleepy.

"I seen him in the restaurant a while ago," said Ted Ames, a short, fat-faced cowboy from the 7AL.

Hashknife nodded. He knew that Sleepy had gone to supper with Roaring Rigby. Roaring came in and shoved his way to Hashknife. His arms were still wet from washing Wind River's head.

"How bad is he hurt, Hashknife?" he asked.

"Bad enough. They've gone for the doctor. Wasn't Sleepy eatin' supper with you, Roarin'?"

"He shore was. I stopped to talk with Jeff Ryker, and Sleepy went out. While I was talkin' to Ryker I heard that shot out near the hitch-rack, and then I heard the one that hit Wind River Jim. I came out, tryin' to find out what was goin' on, and crossed the street. That's when I met you."

"Who shot Wind River Jim?" asked a cowboy.

"The same man who tried to kill me," said Hashknife savagely.

"F'r God's sake!" exploded some one. "'S gittin' salty around here."

"If there's a blanket handy, I'd like to have some of you help carry him over to the hotel," said Hashknife. "We've got a room over there."

The blanket was forthcoming, and there were plenty of volunteers to act as stretcher-bearers. They put Sleepy on the bed, and several of the men waited with Hashknife, until the old doctor arrived. Among them were Slim Regan and Kent Cutter. Hashknife had nothing to say. He sat at the head of the bed, his lean face very grim in the lamplight.

It was the first time in their wanderings that either of them had been seriously hurt. Hashknife knew that only half of the plot had succeeded. These men, whoever they were, had planned to kill him and Sleepy.

It was an hour before the doctor arrived. He sent for more lamps, and the men held them over Sleepy while he made his examination.

"Close," he muttered. "Went all the

way through. Must have went through on an angle. Bad shock, lost lots of blood. Can't tell all about it yet."

He straightened up and peered at Hashknife.

"Pretty lucky, I think. Gut shot is very bad. Unless I miss my guess, he'll pull through. Put the lamps on the table and get me plenty of hot water."

Hashknife stretched his full length and sighed deeply.

"Glad, eh?" said Regan.

"Glad?" Hashknife blinked painfully. "My God!"

He turned and walked over to a window, where he stared out into the night. The room was very quiet.

"We ain't got much money, Doc," said Hashknife slowly. "But if you pull him through, I'll go out and kill anybody you want killed."

The old doctor lifted his eyes and studied the lean figure at the window.

"All right," he said finally, "I'll take you up on that."

"Name your man, Doc."

"I can't do it, Hartley; it's a man who shoots in the dark."

"All right, Doc, you'll get his ears."

SUNDAY was a dull day in Turquoise City. Hashknife hardly left Sleepy's side during the day. Sleepy had regained consciousness and was pretty sick. There was plenty of company. Wind River Jim, his head swathed in bandages, insisted upon playing nurse while Hashknife ate his meals.

"That's the least I can do," declared Wind River. "If your old leather neck hadn't deflected that bullet, it would have hit me between the eyes. And between you and Roarin', you stopped Horse-Collar from chokin' me to death."

Hashknife told Sleepy about Horse-Collar's tourniquet, and Sleepy cried tears. Even with all his pain he still retained his overdeveloped sense of humor. Later in the day Horse-Collar came to the hotel. He was sober now and had been talking to Jimmy Moran at the jail.

"I been talkin' with Jimmy," he told Hashknife confidentially. "He says you're detectin'. Gosh, I didn't know that."

"What about it?" asked Hashknife curiously.

"Thisaway, Hartley. You can't detect and set here. Tomorrow I'll be here. I ain't much of a good nurse, but I'll do what I can."

"That's mighty good of you, Horse-Collar."

"Not p'ticularly. I'm still workin' for Jimmy, and I take orders from the boss. Old Conley's out of danger, they say, and I heard that Frank Moran has paid Jimmy's debts at the Black Horse. I'll be here in the mornin'."

Jeff Ryker came and talked to Hashknife, trying to see if Hashknife had any idea who had shot Sleepy.

"There's been too much of this shooting going on around here," declared Ryker earnestly.

"Well, you can't blame it on Pete Conley or Jimmy Moran," observed Hashknife. "Mebby it's what you'd call an epidemic of crime."

"That's what it is. Conley's trial starts tomorrow. He hasn't a lawyer to defend him. The court will have to appoint some one to defend him, I suppose, and that will cause a delay. Personally, I don't think a lawyer would do him any good."

"You think he's guilty?"

"Beyond a doubt. He went out to kill Mallette. Admits it."

"Admits that he wanted to, Ryker."

"I don't know about that, because I never talked to him; but the evidence is all against him."

Hashknife studied the thin face of the prosecuting attorney—the wry neck inside the misfit collar, the deep-set eyes.

"And you was willin' to kill the case, if that half-breed girl would marry you, eh?" he said coldly.

Ryker flushed hotly and shuffled his feet on the old carpet of the hotel.

"That—that isn't true," he stammered. "I never—"

"Why deny it?" queried Hashknife coldly. "You're not the first man in your position to misuse his power, Ryker. You

ain't settin' no precedent that I know of."

"Oh, all right, I'm not going to discuss my personal affairs with you, Hartley. What I do is none of your business."

Ryker turned on his heel and walked away.

"You stick to your own business then," said Hashknife.

"And you stick to your own," retorted Ryker hotly.

Hashknife laughed softly and went back to Sleepy.

The doctor came again that night. Sleepy had not developed any fever, and the doctor was jubilant. In the morning he was stiff and sore, but cheerful. Horse-Collar Fields came fairly early in the morning and offered to stay with Sleepy as long as Hashknife wanted him to stay.

THE COURT was to open at ten o'clock, but Hashknife did not care about the opening of the case. He saddled his horse and rode out toward the Conley ranch. Near the ford he met Doctor Shelley and Dawn. The doctor had told Dawn about the shooting of Sleepy, and the girl was full of sympathy.

"He's able to cuss this mornin'; so he'll get well," laughed Hashknife. "How's your father?"

"Just fine, Mr. Hartley."

"I wonder if I could talk with him."

"Go ahead," nodded the doctor. "Don't talk too long."

Hashknife rode on to the ranch. He hadn't the slightest idea of why he was coming out to see Conley, except that he had what might be termed a hunch. Mrs. Conley admitted him, and he found the old man propped up in bed.

Conley stared at Hashknife out of sunken eyes.

"I heard them talk about you," he said huskily. "The doctor said your pardner got shot last night. Is he alive?"

"Yeah, luckily," said Hashknife.

"I'm glad somebody has luck." He stared up at the ceiling. "I've never had much of it myself. My son is being tried for his life, and he hasn't even a lawyer. I was goin' to get him one, but I got shot. Dawn has gone down to be with him."

He shifted his eyes to Hashknife.

"Will they hang him, do you think?"

"Law is a queer piece of machinery, Conley."

"Law for a half-breed, Hartley."

"Law for anybody."

"Mebby. They tell me you came with Frank Moran."

Hashknife explained how it happened that he came to Black Horse with Moran, and the old man nodded.

"I hate him," he said.

"Yeah, I know," said Hashknife. "It's too bad, Conley. Hate never got either of you anythin' but misery. Hatin' folks is just like throwin' a rubber ball against a wall. It slams back at you."

"That's true!" The old man's eyes opened wide. "It does. Ain't it queer that my son and Moran's son should both be in jail at the same time. Jimmy Moran shot me, you know."

"Sure of it, Conley?"

"He called me out and shot me."

"Did you see him?"

"No. I don't remember anythin' after I opened the door and stepped outside. But he called and told me who he was."

"He admits it. Oh, he's sorry, Conley. He swears he didn't shoot you. Why, man, he's in love with your daughter."

The old man averted his eyes and his bony old face twitched.

"That's what hurts, Hartley—hurts worse than the bullet-hole in my side. That's what hate does. I—I was goin' to let Dawn marry Jimmy Moran, because I hated his father. Goin' to help his son marry a half-breed girl. It wasn't right."

"It was right, Conley; he loves her."

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't want him to at first. I gave him orders to keep away. But I got to thinkin' how it would hurt Frank Moran. That's hate. I'm not fit for much. By God, I was goin' to sell my girl! It's the same thing. Love! Bah! What in hell did I care about love? But I've had plenty of time to think lately. I fenced Hot Creek against the Big 4, but I didn't kill them steers. No, I didn't, Hartley. I'm a cowman. I've

been a cowman ever since the old minin' days. Do you know, this ranch was a minin' claim? It was. About twenty-five years ago I located this as a minin' claim. In them days there was plenty of buyin' and sellin' prospects. You know Ryker? He was an assayer. Frank Moran was here. He had plenty of money to buy mines. He's always had money."

"You not talk too much," advised Mrs. Conley.

"I'm all right, mother. It was great in the old days; but the mines played out. This was my last location. I dug my discovery hole just west of Hot Creek. There's an old sycamore up there on the slope. It was a small tree twenty-five years ago, and it was there that I tacked my notice and dug my discovery. But things went wrong in the minin' game, and a little later I homesteaded and went in for cattle. I went up into Idaho to buy stock and that's where I met Minnie."

"My father big chief," said Mrs. Conley.

"Mm-m-m-m," grunted Conley. "Not so awful big. You see, he stole some horses from me, and I went after 'em. I made him a trade for Minnie. He had six other daughters; so it wasn't hard to make a trade, you see."

"We get married, too," said Minnie.

"We shore did; and I've never been sorry, Hartley."

"Well, that's great," smiled Hashknife. "You better take a rest now, I'll see you ag'in', Conley."

"All right; be sure and come ag'in', Hartley."

Hashknife rode around the house and headed for Hot Creek. He wanted to see that old prospect hole. He had a hunch that the Conley ranch was being desired for more than a winter water-hole and a shelter from blizzards.

He located the big sycamore and, in the brush at its base, he found the old prospect-hole, which was practically hidden in an overhang of brush. It was an open cut, possibly five feet long, three or four feet wide, and not over five feet deep.

Hashknife was not a miner, but he knew a little about rocks. It seemed to him that there were indications that some one had broken off a little of the exposed ledge of reddish quartz long since the hole had been originally dug. Some of the quartz was badly honeycombed, rusty looking stuff.

He broke off a small chunk from about the center of the upper end of the cut, put it in his pocket and went back to his horse. His hunch was fading out now. It did not seem that this mere showing of honeycombed quartz would warrant any one's making a great effort to purchase the entire ranch.

He rode back to the main gate and followed the fence down to the ford, where he dismounted and drank from the river. Sitting down on a convenient boulder, he took out the chunk of rock and washed it carefully, while the tall gray horse slaked its thirst and looked curiously at him.

A washing showed the quartz to be thoroughly honeycombed and not very hard. Taking the rock in his palm he struck it sharply against another rock, breaking it in several small pieces. For several moments he stared at the broken fragments.

Gold! It gleamed through the lace-like texture of the broken quartz, and there were even specks of it on his palm.

He examined it closely, knowing that it was gold. Hashknife had never seen rock so rich in his life. He tried to estimate its worth per ton, but gave it up. The rock was not heavy. It would take a lot of it to weigh a ton, and if all of it was as rich as this, it would be worth more money than Hashknife could estimate.

He put the rock back in his pocket. It was not hard for him to imagine what had happened. Conley had found a piece of promising float, located the property, dug a discovery hole and had never had an assay made. The mining boom had died, and Conley had never gone any further with the prospect.

HASHKNIFE rode back to Turquoise City and went to the assay office, where he met "Mica" Jones, the old bald-headed assayer who ran the business for

Ryker. The little place stank of acids.

Jones was idly reading a much-thumbed mining journal, when Hashknife came in and placed a piece of the ore on the battered old counter. Jones put on his glasses and picked up a receipt blank.

"Assay it for lead, will you?" said Hashknife.

Jones glanced at the sample. It was a most unusual request. He squinted closely at it and looked at Hashknife.

"There ain't no lead in that stuff," he said, giving an honest opinion.

"What do you think's in it, pardner?"

Jones picked up the sample, turned it slowly in his gnarled hand and gave Hashknife a sharp glance. But the tall cowboy merely slouched against the counter, looking at other pieces of ore on the counter. Mica Jones swallowed heavily. He had seen the gold.

"It ain't lead-bearin' rock," he said, clearing his throat harshly.

"Pshaw! Well, let it go then. I don't know much about ore. Do you know anythin' about minin' laws, pardner?"

Mica Jones frowned. It was difficult for him to keep his eyes off that piece of crumbly red ore.

"Little bit," he said. "Whatcha want to know?"

"Ain't there some kind of a minin' law that lets you go on a man's ranch and locate a mine, if you can prove it's worth more for mineral than it is for agriculture?"

Mica Jones carefully placed the piece of ore on a shelf behind him, drew out a plug of tobacco and bit off a huge portion.

"Yea-a-ah, I think there is. It was tried out five year ago. Feller jumped in on a ranch about ten mile below here and located a mine. Quoted that law and got a bullet plumb through him. They tried this rancher for murder, and the lawyer orated that this dead client was actin' accordin' to law; but the jury exonerated him without leavin' their seat. It kinda set a precedent, you see. Out here—" Mica shifted his chew thoughtfully—"out here, you can hold what you've got, pardner."

"That's a good system," agreed Hashknife. "Thanks for the opinion. Never mind assayin' that stone."

"Oh, that's all right; come in ag'in'."

"Thank you."

Hashknife went to the hotel and found Horse-Collar and Lovely with Sleepy, who was resting easily. The doctor had been there and changed the dressing.

"Wind River was over here from the court-room a while ago," said Lovely. "They're goin' ahead with the trial of Pete Conley. The judge offered to postpone the trial until Pete could get a lawyer, but the bug-headed half-breed said to go ahead; he didn't need any lawyer.

"They've got the jury already. Ryker ain't particular, because he's got a cinch. Him and the judge locked horns a few times this mornin', and the boys had fun out of it. Roarin' come damn near runnin' everybody out of the court-room. Dawn is up there with Pete—jist them two. I tell you it don't look right. It's jist them two agin' the judge, jury and the crowd, not to mention Ryker. The judge says it's a farce. What's a farce, Hartley?"

"It's a cooked game that looks honest."

"Oh, yeah. He prob'ly meant that Pete ain't got a chance. But Pete's hard-headed. The judge asked him if he didn't want the case postponed until he could get a lawyer. Pete asked him where in hell he could find a lawyer that knew who killed Joe Mallette. It made everybody laugh."

"They'll have Jimmy on the stand," said Horse-Collar. "He'll have to tell about that poker game, I reckon. English Ed will be a witness, and the doctor said he'd have to testify; but what good will it do the half-breed? They won't be helpin' him. Suppose Mallette did steal from Pete?"

"It's murder, just the same," said Hashknife. "I suppose there's quite a crowd at the court-house."

"Biggest you ever seen," said Horse-collar. "Everybody in the country. I'd hate to be in Roarin' Rigby's shoes, if he has to hang Pete."

"A-a-aw, talk about something' pleasant," said Sleepy.

HASHKNIFE saw Dawn Conley after the trial was over for the day, and he talked to her for awhile. She did not see a single loophole for Peter. Of course, the evidence was all circumstantial, but there was plenty of evidence that Peter had left the saloon that night with a revolver in his hand.

English Ed had testified to what he knew about it. The old doctor, who was also the coroner, testified. Jimmy Moran had not been brought from the jail to testify; but his testimony would be taken the next morning. Roaring Rigby had told the court how he had outwitted the men who came out to Conley's ranch that night to lynch Peter, and his testimony caused a laugh. Most of the men who had ridden through the hills that night were in the room.

Ryker had dominated the trial. The old judge, white of face, plainly nervous, humped at his desk. At times he would rebuke Ryker; but there was little dignity left in the man. He continually scanned the room, as if seeking the men who had warned him to leave Turquoise City.

In a half-open drawer at his right hand was a Colt revolver, fully loaded, and most of the time his hand rested on that drawer.

After Dawn had ridden away, Hashknife met Franklyn Moran. He had attended the trial and he told Hashknife much of what had happened. He was cheerful over the rapid recovery of Moses Conley, but he was curious to know who had shot Sleepy.

"You know as much as I do," said Hashknife.

Ryker came from the court-room and gave them a curt nod as he went past, carrying papers and several books. The sheriff and the judge were close behind him; the sheriff walked home with him.

"Scared to death," said Moran, after the sheriff and judge were out of hearing. "The man is positively on edge. I don't believe he knows what the trial is all about. To begin with, his nerves are all shot from whisky."

"Are they?" asked Hashknife.

"Sure they are; he's the greatest single-handed drinker in this country. I haven't seen him for almost a year, and he's ten years older than he was at that time."

"I'd like to talk with him," said Hashknife. "I believe I'll go visitin'."

"Good luck to you," laughed Moran.

Hashknife hurried across the street and went through the alley between the saloon and restaurant. The sheriff and the judge were at the judge's gate, talking together, when Hashknife came up to them. Roaring introduced them, and the judge offered Hashknife a very limp hand.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said the judge huskily. "Nice weather we're having these days."

"Pretty good," smiled Hashknife. "The sheriff has told me a lot about things that have happened around here, Judge, and I just wondered if you happened to keep one of those warnings."

The judge started visibly and looked at Roaring.

"It's all right, Judge," assured Roaring.

"I have," said the judge firmly, "the first one."

"May I take a look at it?"

"You may; I'll get it for you, Mr. Hartley."

The judge went into the house and came out in a few moments with the half-sheet of paper. The warning had been written with a pen, or rather printed with a pen. The paper was of ordinary grade, unglazed.

Hashknife looked it over carefully, examining the letters, even looking through it at the sun. There was a faint watermark—*Fordhill Bond*. Hashknife gave the paper back to the judge.

"What do you make of it?" asked Roaring anxiously.

"Who knows?" smiled Hashknife.

"Are you a handwriting expert?" asked the old judge.

Hashknife laughed softly and shook his head.

"Not me, Judge. I know pen and ink

from typewriter, but that's about all."

"You didn't come up to the trial, did you?" asked Roaring.

"I've been busy. They tell me Peter Conley hasn't a chance in the world."

"Gentlemen," said the judge wearily, "let us not discuss the trial. Anything else, and I am at your service. Won't you come in?"

Roaring shook his head quickly.

"Got to get back, Judge."

Hashknife thanked the judge, but declined his invitation.

ON THE way back to the office, Roaring told Hashknife that the judge had asked him to walk home with him.

"He's scared to death," declared Roaring. "Personally, I don't think they'll harm him. I don't think they'd 'a' hurt Jim Randall, but he didn't wait to see."

"Time will tell," said Hashknife. "The old judge has a right to be nervous."

They went back to the office, where Wind River Jim was changing the bandage on his sore head. Hashknife sat down at the sheriff's desk and rolled a smoke, while Roaring assisted Wind River Jim with his bandage. There were several sheets of writing paper on the desk, bearing the letterhead of the sheriff's office. Hashknife picked one of them up in his hand and looked through it. Across the bottom of the sheet was the water-mark—*Fordhill Bond.*

He dropped the sheet of paper back on the desk and lighted his cigaret.

"I'd like to get a line on the jigger that knocked on my temple," growled Wind River Jim. "It shore aches me."

"What does Pete think of the trial?" asked Hashknife.

"Sore about it."

Roaring pinned the end of the bandage and came back to the desk.

"He testified today. Ryker tried to get him mad. I don't think the jury believed Pete's story. He admitted he wanted to shoot Mallette. He put up a good argument. Ryker wanted to know why he wanted to kill Mallette, and if he didn't know it would be murder; and Pete asked him if it was murder to kill a horse-thief. He said that Mallette stole his money, and that stealin' was stealin'; and, by golly, the judge agreed with him, I think! You see, he's bein' tried for first-degree murder, and if that knot-headed jury brings in a verdict of guilty, it's up to the judge to soak him awful hard. He can either hang Pete or give him life."

"If somebody don't shoot the judge between now and the time he's supposed to pass sentence," said Roaring dryly.

"I don't think they will," said Hashknife. "There's other things to think about."

Hashknife didn't tell them what he meant, but went back to the hotel to relieve Horse-Collar Fields. Sleepy was in good spirits, much better than Hashknife expected him to be.

"How's it comin', cowboy?" asked Sleepy.

"I'm just about to sing me a little song," replied Hashknife, and Sleepy knew what that song meant.

Hashknife did not have a particularly melodious voice and seldom did he lift his voice in song, except when a puzzle was working out to his satisfaction.

"And me flat in bed," wailed Sleepy. "But go easy, pardner. You can see just how easy it is for to go down and out. I never had no warnin'. I felt it slap me down, but I never heard the shot. It hurts worse now than it has any time. The doctor says it's healin' up fine. You'll go easy, won't you, Hashknife?"

"If you need help, call on Horse-Collar and Lovely. They're the biggest liars that ever saw the sun come up, but they're on the square. Dang the luck, I want to ride with you. Can't you put it off for a week or so? The doctor says I'll be able to ride in a week or ten days, if I wear a wide belt."

"You lay still and take it easy. Get well, cowboy. I shore miss you. Ain't had nobody crabbin' at me for two days, and it ain't natural. And I'm not goin' to get hurt. Can you eat anythin'?"

"Soup!"

"All right. I'll git a tray of grub at the

restaurant, and a bowl of soup. We'll eat up here and, by golly, I'll stay here until daylight. I'm as scared as the judge was. I'll find Horse-Collar Fields and ask him to come agin' tomorrow morning."

IT WAS just daylight when Hashknife left the hotel. The street was deserted at that time in the morning, but Hashknife did not lose his vigilance. He found the keeper of the livery-stable, asleep in his little inside office, and told him he was taking his horse out.

"Yeah, all right," yawned the man. "Need any help?"

"No, I'll manage," laughed Hashknife. "What time did Ryker get back last night?"

"Ryker? Oh, it was about midnight."

"I just wondered."

Hashknife went to his horse, grinning to himself in the gloom of the stable. He knew nothing about Ryker's having been out last night, but he had followed another of his hunches when he asked the question.

He took the right-hand road out of Turquoise City, traveling east. Hashknife had never been over this road, so he went carefully. The country was fairly flat for about two miles. Then the road entered the foot-hills. About four miles from town he swung off the road, but kept it in sight and finally came out on a hog-back ridge from where he could get a good view of the 7AL ranch.

He was not over two hundred yards from the buildings, but his view of the one-story ranch-house was partly obstructed by a huge stable and several sycamore trees. Behind the stable sprawled a series of corrals and beyond them could be seen the top of the old bunk-house.

There was smoke coming from the ranch-house. A man came around the corner of the stable and entered the corral at the rear, where there were several horses. A little later he came out, leading a bay horse, which he led around the stable out of Hashknife's sight.

Hashknife tied his horse in a thicket and came back to the crest of the ridge, where he sat down to wait. It was about thirty minutes later that three men rode away from the ranch-house and came down along the road, passing Hashknife close enough for him to identify Kent Cutter and Ted Ames. The third man was Henry Miller.

They disappeared down the road, and Hashknife went back to his horse. He guessed that Cutter had a cook. There was a fourth man, Jud Hardy. Hashknife knew him for a thin-faced, hard-jawed young man, who had bad eyes—not physically, but morally. Eyes meant quite a lot to Hashknife, when it came to judging a man's character.

Hashknife mounted his gray horse and rode down to the ranch-house. There was a main gate, but it was wide open, sagging on its hinges. He rode around to the rear, where he found the kitchen door open. There was a pleasant odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee, doubly pleasant to Hashknife, who had had no breakfast.

As he swung out of his saddle, the cook came to the door. He was a grizzled little man, with a big mustache and a slight limp; a typical old round-up cook. In his hand was a frying-pan, still smoking hot. He peered at Hashknife wonderingly.

"Hyah, pardner," greeted Hashknife, "how about a little breakfast?"

"Hyah," he grunted, "pretty good—mebby."

He looked Hashknife over carefully and glanced at the tall gray horse.

"Ridin' kinda early, ain't you, stranger?" he asked.

"No law ag'in' it, is there?"

"Not that I ever heard about. Excuse me. My name's McCall. 'Jinyus' McCall, to be exact. Used to be Albert, until I cooked a forty-year-old sage-hen for some fellers. One of 'em said I was a jinyus—and it stuck. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Hashknife laughed and scraped his heel along the short boards that had been laid as a walk near the door. He glanced down at the boards, but lifted his head quickly.

"C'mon in," invited Jinyus. "I'll make

you somethin' to eat right off the stove."

"Fine."

Hashknife stooped over quickly and picked up a little copper shell near the boards. The cook was looking at him curiously.

"Somebody been havin' target practise, eh?" said Hashknife, exhibiting the twenty-two shell.

"Pop-gun practise!" snorted Jinyus. "Ever since Cutter sent away for that danged gun, they've shot at everythin' on the ranch. Nothin' is safe. Cutter is the boss here."

"Oh, I see," smiled Hashknife. He started to enter the kitchen, but a man's voice stopped him short.

"What in hell do you want here?"

Hashknife turned slowly. About ten feet away stood Jud Hardy. His hair was uncombed and he had the general appearance of a man who had just got out of bed.

"I didn't want anythin'," said Hashknife meekly.

He noticed that Jud's hand was swinging close to his gun.

"You didn't, eh?" flared Jud. "Who are you lookin' for?"

"Not a soul. I was just passin' and smelled breakfast; the cook said he'd feed me, so I was goin' to eat."

"Is that so? Well, the boss ain't here, and the cook don't run this ranch. If you came from town, it's damn funny you didn't meet him."

"I didn't say I came from town," said Hashknife.

"Didn't anybody ask you, did they? You turn around and get on that horse."

Turn around and get on that horse! That was just what Hashknife was not going to do. He started to turn, as if to comply with Hardy's order, but at the same time he drew his gun so quickly that Hardy was looking down the muzzle of it before he realized that Hashknife had not turned.

The cook stood there, his mouth wide open, the skillet still in his hand. Slowly Jud Hardy's hands came up to a level with his shoulders.

"Unbuckle your belt and let it drop," ordered Hashknife.

One look at Hashknife's eyes, and Hardy complied.

"Back up five steps. Cook, you stand like you are."

"Believe me!" gasped the cook earnestly.

Hashknife walked forward, plucked Hardy's gun from the holster and flung it far back toward the corral. Then he backed to his horse, mounted and holstered his gun.

"Thanks for the breakfast, just the same, Jinyus," he said.

"Oh, you're completely welcome."

Without further conversation he whirled his horse around and galloped off down the road.

JUD HARDY stared at the cook and slowly put down his hands.

"That shore as hell beats me," declared the cook foolishly. "What was all that gunplay about, Jud?"

Jud spat savagely and went after his gun. It had struck on its muzzle and was half-full of dirt and gravel. Jud came back to the kitchen door, swearing to himself.

"Gee-mighty, that feller was shore forked!" said the cook. "Didja ever see a gun pulled thataway, Jud. Jist *whap!* And you're it."

"Yeah," growled Jud darkly. He was fast with a gun himself.

"What did he want, Jinyus?"

"Breakfast."

"Tha'sso? Is that all?"

"Well, that's all he asked for."

"What did he pick up off the ground? He was showin' it to you."

"Oh, that," the cook grinned. "Nothin' but one of them little empty twenty-two shells. He asked me if we'd been havin' target practise, and I said that ever since Cutter had sent for that damn gun, they'd been shootin' at everythin'."

Jud stared at Jinyus for several moments.

"Yea-a-a-ah? The hell he did!"

"Shore did. Go wash your face and I'll have you some eggs."

"To hell with the eggs! I'm goin' to town."

Jud whirled and ran down to the bunkhouse. Jinyus looked after him, shaking his head.

"I dunno what it's all about," he told himself aloud, "but it looks t' me as though somebody was all het up. My, but that jigger shore can yank a six-gun!"

WITHIN fifteen minutes after the opening of court that morning the case had gone to the jury. Ryker had made no plea to the jury, and the judge's instructions were summed up in very few words. The twelve men had filed out, preceded by Wind River Jim, who acted as bailiff.

The judge did not retire. He slumped forward on his desk, resting his chin on one hand and watching the crowded room. Ryker sat at his table, slouched back in his chair, confident that the jury would bring a verdict for him.

At the opposite table sat Dawn and Peter with Roaring Rigby. Peter was not handcuffed. All the cattle ranches in the country were represented. The Black Horse Saloon was closed, so that every one could attend, and there was a sprinkling of the girls from the redlight row.

English Ed had a front seat, as did Cutter and Frank Moran. The room buzzed with conversation. English Ed leaned past Cutter and spoke to Moran—

"I wonder where Hartley is, Moran?"

"I don't know."

"He pulled out almost at daylight. One of my swampers saw him ride out of town."

Moran smiled thinly.

"I can't quite figure things out, Ed. I wonder who shot Stevens."

"That's a puzzle. Looks funny. Roaring thinks that bullet that hit Wind River Jim was intended for Hartley. In fact it burned Hartley's neck before it hit Wind River."

"Somebody is scared of 'em," declared Moran.

"Why would anybody be scared of 'em?" queried Cutter.

"I don't know—but they are."

"Who—Hartley and Stevens?" asked Cutter.

"No, the men who shot 'em."

Ryker got up and came over to them, a smile on his thin lips.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It looks like a poor piece of justice to me," growled Moran. "That kid needed legal advice."

"He could have had it, Moran. I've played easy with him. There's not a juror from this end of the county, and I made no plea. What more could I do?"

"He was as good as hung before the trial started," said Cutter.

"That's the worst of it," said English Ed. "I'm sorry for my part in it. Mallette was no good. No, I don't mean that I uphold murdering a man because he's no good. But I'm of the opinion that Mallette stole that pot, and if Pete had killed him on the spot, I'd have hired a lawyer to free him."

Moran looked queerly at English Ed.

"I didn't expect that from you, Ed."

The gambler flushed.

"I've been accused of a lot of things I never did, Moran."

"I suppose."

"The judge keeps an eye on me," said the gambler softly. "He thinks I tried to run him out. I didn't."

"He's getting old," said Ryker. "We need a younger man on the bench."

"You, for instance," suggested Moran.

"Why not? I belong here and I can qualify."

Ryker laughed, and walked over to the table beside Dawn. He spoke to her and she got quickly to her feet.

"Go and sit down where you belong," she said coldly.

Ryker laughed angrily, but did not move. The judge struck the top of his desk with a clenched hand.

"Ryker, go and sit down!" he snapped. "That girl and her brother are under the protection of this court."

"Oh, is that so?" demanded Ryker. "Since when did the court have jurisdiction over a prosecutor during a recess?"

Before the judge had a chance to reply, Pete Conley sprang from his chair, caught Ryker by the collar with his left hand and smashed him in the face with his right fist. He had only time to hit Ryker once before Roaring had grasped him in both arms and dragged him away.

Ryker went to his haunches, but staggered back to his feet, gore running from his nose, his big collar half-torn from his skinny neck. The room was in an uproar. Roaring forced Pete back into his chair and held him down.

Ryker was dazed, blinded. He clawed under his coat trying to draw a big Colt gun before Cutter sprang across the railing and grasped him. He swung Ryker around, talking swiftly. He handed Ryker a handkerchief to mop off the blood; and the prosecutor of Black Horse County leaned against his own table.

The judge hammered wildly on his table, while the cowboys in the audience whooped with joy. This was the first bit of action they had seen. Roaring talked earnestly with Pete, who nodded in agreement. Roaring smiled with evident satisfaction, and there was a ghost of a smile on the face of the old judge.

"By golly!" roared the voice of Lovely Lucas from the back of the room. "That's the first time I ever saw a half-breed git the best of anythin' in a court-room!"

"Turn 'em loose, and I'll take the breed for forty dollars, even money!" boomed Mark Clayton, of the Big 4.

The old judge rapped for order.

"Cease this disturbance, or I'll have the sheriff clear the court!"

"You better let well enough alone," said Hank Pitts. "If Roarin' Rigby lets loose of Pete, Ryker loses his scalp."

Hank's sally brought a laugh that the judge was unable to check. Dawn was leaning forward on the table, crying. Ryker was angry. He tried to arrange his collar, but found that Pete had torn out the button-hole. He finally took it off, exposing about eight inches of thin neck.

Wind River Jim came from the jury-room, closing the door behind him. The judge rapped again for silence.

"They've made up their minds, Judge," said Wind River.

"Bring them in," said the judge wearily.

The room became silent, as the twelve men filed in and sat down. They looked curiously at Ryker, who was holding the handkerchief to his nose and lips, but none of them looked at Pete.

"Gentlemen," said the old judge, "have you reached a decision?"

The foreman of the jury, a tall, bearded cattleman from south of Turquoise City, arose and handed Wind River a sheet of paper.

"We have, Judge," he said, and sat down heavily.

Wind River gave the paper to the judge, who read it slowly.

For a space of possibly ten seconds the judge stared at the back of the room, not a muscle of his face moving. An impatient cowboy scraped a boot-heel on the floor, and it sounded very loud and harsh in that silent room.

"This is your verdict?" asked the judge, without looking at the jury.

"That's it," said the foreman.

The old judge shifted his eyes and looked at Peter Conley.

"Peter Conley, stand up," he said. It was little more than a whisper.

Roaring nudged Pete; he got awkwardly to his feet. Dawn got to her feet, as if to assist Pete, and the judge shifted his gaze to her. He looked back at the verdict.

"Peter Conley," he said, "the jury has found you guilty of murder in the first degree."

The judge stopped, but did not look up. Dawn reached over and put her hand on Pete's arm. He turned his head and looked at her, his face twisted painfully.

THERE came a slight noise from the rear of the room, and the judge looked up. It was Hashknife Hartley, coming down the aisle, his spurs rasping harshly on the board floor—a jarring note in the most dramatic moment of the trial. But Hashknife did not seem aware of it. There was an empty seat at the end

of the first row, and he went all the way down to it.

He looked at Ryker as he sat down, and a smile creased his wide lips. He looked at Peter and Dawn, standing up. The girl looked at him and there were tears in her eyes and on her cheeks. Hashknife turned his head and looked at the silent jury. The room was very quiet.

"They found him guilty, Hartley," whispered a cowboy behind Hashknife and the whisper could be heard all over the room.

The judge looked sharply at the whisperer.

"Peter Conley," he said slowly, as if weighing every word, "you have been found guilty. Is there any reason why the sentence of the court should not be imposed at this time?"

Peter did not speak. He did not know what to say.

"Have you nothing to say, Peter Conley?"

"I didn't kill him, Judge; that's all I say."

Hashknife got slowly to his feet, facing the judge.

"If you don't mind, Judge," he said slowly, "I'd like to speak for Pete Conley."

"I object!" snapped Ryker hotly.

"You look like you had once before," said Hashknife. "I'm kinda surprized at all that red on your handkerchief, Ryker; I thought you'd bleed yaller."

Ryker turned appealingly to the judge, but the judge did not look at him.

"What did you want to say, Hartley?" he asked.

"Why not sentence the guilty man?"

"The guilty man?" It was a whisper—a hoarse whisper.

"The man who killed Joe Mallette by mistake, Judge. The man who dragged Joe Mallette from your door and took him across that vacant piece of ground, draggin' his boots full of gravel. Mallette was so drunk that he made a mistake in houses, Judge. You're safe; you shot because you thought he had come to fulfill that warnin'. Tell the truth!"

Roaring was on his feet, as were half of the men in the room. The judge continued to stare at Hashknife, whose voice rang like a bell in that crowded room.

"What do you mean, Hartley?" cried Roaring.

"Ask the judge; he knows."

The old judge got slowly to his feet, his face white, his mouth half-open, breathing heavily. His right hand was in the drawer of his desk, clutching the heavy revolver.

"Be quiet!" cried Hashknife. "Let him talk!"

The judge wet his lips with his tongue.

"It's time to tell," he said. "Yes, it's time. Hartley's right. I hoped the jury—but that's past. I killed Mallette. The gambling element warned me to get out of town. They swore to kill me. You all know it. I wouldn't run. I—I waited for them to come after me. Mallette came. He flung open the door of my house and came in. I—I was sitting in my chair beside my table, and I shot once."

His eyes went slowly around the room and he swallowed painfully.

"I never shot a man before," he continued. "Wong Kee and I dragged him away. Better to have left him there and sent for the sheriff. But a man don't know what he would do, until the time comes. Pete Conley is innocent. I killed in what I thought was self-defense."

He lifted his head and his voice grew stronger.

"I'm glad it's over now."

English Ed was on his feet, facing Hashknife and the crowd.

"I don't blame the judge," he said. "Mallette was drunk and he got into the wrong place; but I'll swear that Mallette was not in any plot to run the judge out. It was not the gamblers. I'll swear that we had nothing to do with it."

"And I'll back you, Holmes," said Hashknife.

He stepped through the railing his back to the jury, where he could face the crowd. A man was coming hurriedly down the aisle. It was Horse-Collar Fields. He stopped just short of the railing and said to Hashknife—

"He'll be here in a minute, Hashknife."

Hashknife backed up a step and his hands dropped to his sides. The eyes of all in the room were upon him, and they saw him hunch forward a trifle, his right arm lifting just above his waist-line.

"It's Jud Hardy comin'," he said evenly. "He's comin' from the 7AL ranch, ridin' the hocks off his horse to tell his outfit that Hashknife Hartley found an empty twenty-two shell beside the kitchen door. He tried to kill me, I reckon. He knew that a twenty-two was used to kill them eight Big 4 steers. He knew there was a million dollar ledge of gold ore on the Hot Creek ranch, and he wanted his share. He knew, and his outfit knew, that as long as Moses Conley lived he'd never sell out—and they wanted it. So they tried to send the Big 4 against Conley and when that didn't work they tried to kill him. Cutter—don't!"

Hashknife drew swiftly and fired from his hip. The report of his gun blended with the one that flashed beside him from Horse-Collar's gun.

Cutter staggered sidewise, trying to cock the gun in his hand, but English Ed caught him in his arms and flung him to the floor. Wind River Jim vaulted the railing and fell upon Ted Ames, who was trying to reach the aisle, and from further back in the room came the triumphant yell from Slim Regan:

"Ho-o-o-old fast, Henry! Take his feet, Bill!"

They had captured Henry Miller. Horse-Collar had fired one shot at Ryker, who had drawn his gun, and then had whirled and run swiftly from the courtroom.

"Got Mister Miller!" yelled Regan.

FROM outside the building came a fusilade of shots, a wild yell. Some of the men ran out, crowding at the doorway, and some of them fell down. The room was in an uproar. The old judge had drawn his gun from the drawer and was standing very straight, resting the muzzle of the gun on his desk. The room was hazy with smoke. Roaring was shielding Dawn from the crowd.

English Ed got slowly to his feet. One knee of his pin-striped trousers was split wide open and the knot of his necktie was under his left ear. Cutter did not get up. Ryker was sprawled across his desk, one hand hanging limply over the edge, his gun on the floor. Hashknife stepped over to the table and touched the prosecuting attorney on the shoulder.

"Horse-Collar Fields shoots straight", said Hashknife meaningly.

The crowd of men was coming into the room again, headed by Horse-Collar. They were bringing a disheveled Jud Hardy, whose face was bruised and dusty, clothes torn.

"He tried to git away on his bronc when he heard the shootin'!" yelled Horse-Collar triumphantly. "I had t' hit him on the fly, by golly!"

"Kent Cutter's dead," said Roaring Rigby. "I don't know yet what it was all about, Hashknife."

"He's a liar!" wailed Jud Hardy.

"You don't even know what he said!" snorted Lovely Lucas.

"Bring 'em down here," ordered Hashknife. "All three of 'em."

They came—Henry Miller, Jud Hardy, Ted Ames—brought down bodily by cowboys who longed for a chance to handle them roughly. Hashknife looked them over. Miller and Hardy shut their lips tightly. Hashknife stepped up to Ted Ames.

"You'll talk," he said. "I've got the goods on all of you; but a talk will help you out, Ames—State's evidence, you know."

"Squealer, eh?" defiantly.

"Not now. It's a hangin' matter—unless you talk."

Ames looked around at the faces of the men.

"I'll talk," he said. "Cutter and Ryker schemed it, just like you said. Cutter shot Conley; Jimmy Moran almost got Cutter that night. Me and Cutter killed them Big 4 steers. Pete Conley had the only twenty-two in the country, until

Cutter sent away for one. Usin' a twenty-two would cinch it on to Conley. Cutter wanted Mose Conley out of the way, so he could buy the ranch. Dawn Conley admitted to Ryker that she and her mother would be willin' to sell."

"Who shot Sleepy, my pardner, and tried to kill me?"

"Me and Jud Hardy. I missed you, Cutter said we'd have to kill you both, and they'd blame English Ed and his gang."

"All right," nodded Hashknife. "Cutter knew I found that mine, didn't he?"

"Ryker came out and told us last night."

"And Ryker was the one who wrote the warnings, wasn't he? He used paper that the county furnished."

"He wrote 'em," nodded Ames. "Cutter wanted to be judge of this county, and he hated Judge Beal. They warned the sheriff, too. Cutter said he was too honest. But we didn't know who killed Mallette. We thought Pete was to blame for that. Ryker wanted to marry Dawn Conley. Said he'd get control of the property thataway. Ryker was a bad bird."

"Thank you, Ames. You're wise to tell it all, and it won't hurt you none at the trial."

Hashknife turned to the old judge, who still stood at the desk, gun in hand.

"You can put up your gun, Judge," he said. "The whole county will vindicate you for your mistake. Mallette was a thief and a card-sharp. You did just what any man would have done. Now, forget it."

"I—I'll have to put these three birdies in jail," said Roarin', "and turn Jimmy Moran loose, eh?"

"Y'betcha."

"Bring 'em along, boys."

Hashknife turned to meet Dawn and Pete. None of them spoke for several moments. Franklyn Moran stepped beside Dawn; he seemed bewildered. Hashknife smiled at Dawn.

"Let's not talk about it, Dawn," he suggested. "Jimmy will be out pretty quick, and he'll come up the street, you know."

Dawn glanced quickly at Franklyn Moran.

"It's—uh—all right," he said. "Fine, Dawn."

"I don't talk much," said Pete dumbly.

"That's fine," grinned Hashknife, "You're a man after my own heart."

Dawn and Pete went hurriedly up the aisle. The old judge came down to Hashknife and Moran and held out his hand to Hashknife.

"I don't pretend to know much about it," he said slowly.

They shook hands gravely, and Moran shook hands with the judge.

"You know many things, young man," said the judge. "I have grown very old today, but I'm going to grow younger. I hope you stay with us; Turquoise City needs men like you."

"I hope he will stay," said Moran. "I'm still shocked, and I don't know what to do or say."

"Will you do me a favor?" asked Hashknife.

"Anything in the world, Hartley."

"Come out and see Moses Conley with me."

"Moses Conley? Why, well, that's quite—I'll go."

They walked from the court room and met the doctor on the stairs.

"My goodness!" he blurted. "More shooting! I jump around like a grasshopper. What was it? Nobody talks—they yell. Ten men yelling at me at the same time. I can't hardly keep Stevens in bed. Fields came up and danced on the foot of the bed. Crazy men."

"You can't do any good up there, Doc," said Hashknife.

"Only in your capacity as coroner."

They went on down to the street. Jimmy was running up from the jail, and Dawn met him. Pete stood on the sidewalk, blinking around. He didn't know what to do.

Hashknife took Moran by the arm and led him down to where Dawn and Jimmy were looking at each other. Jimmy

looked at his father and grinned foolishly.

"Hyah, Dad," he said. "How are you?"

"All right, Jimmy. Why don't you kiss her. We're all going out to see her father."

"For heaven's sake!" Jimmy cried. "Who upset the world?" He stepped past Dawn and held out his hand to Hashknife. "You did," said Jimmy. "I'm all out of words, Hartley."

"Good, boy! So am I."

IT WAS Mrs. Conley who saw them from afar, as they came up the dusty road. There was a top-buggy, and several men on horseback. She had been anxiously waiting for Dawn to come home and bring the news. It had been impossible for her to leave her husband, as there was no one else to take care of him. She went back to the old man.

"Some folks come," she said. "One buggy, five, six horses. They turn in our gate."

"Who can it be? What has happened now, Minnie? Dawn said she was sure the case would go to the jury today. Who would be coming here today?"

"I go look."

Mrs. Conley stood dumbly on the porch and watched Pete and Dawn and Jimmy Moran get out of the buggy, while Franklyn Moran, Slim Regan, Lovely Lucas, Hank Pitts and Hashknife dismounted from their horses.

Dawn ran up and threw her arms around her mother, who merely stared at everybody, especially at Pete, who grinned sheepishly.

"Peter is free, mother!" exclaimed Dawn. "He didn't shoot Mallette! Don't you understand? He's free!"

"Pretty damn good, eh?" The Indian woman smiled.

"Will you shake hands with me?" asked Moran, holding out his hand to Mrs. Conley.

She looked closely at him for a moment.

"Your name Moran. You want to shake hands? You crazy?"

"No, I'm not crazy. I want to be a friend."

"Damn funny."

She shook hands with him wonderingly, and they all went into the house. Dawn ran to her father, telling him the good news. Conley patted her on the head and stared at Franklyn Moran, his sunken eyes wide with wonder.

"Conley," said Moran, coming in close to the bed, "I came to see if we can't be friends. It seems that our kids have decided to marry each other, and I think it's time for us to bury the hatchet. Everything else has been straightened out. The 7AL were the ones that caused the trouble. They tried to start war between us. They killed my cattle on your land, and they tried to kill you. Hartley run 'em down. Cutter is dead and the rest of his gang are in jail. Ryker is dead; he was a leader in their crooked work. Will you shake hands with me?"

The old man held out a shaking hand.

"Hartley tells me you are rich," said Moran, "and I want to be the first one to congratulate you. Ryker and Cutter discovered a rich gold ledge on your ranch, and that's one of the reasons they wanted to buy you out. Hartley found it, too. That was one of his clews, I suppose."

The old man's eyes opened widely and he stared at Hashknife.

"Rich gold ledge?" he queried wonderingly.

"Rich enough to make them do murder to get it," said Hashknife. "It's that old prospect you told me about—the one east of Hot Creek, under the big sycamore."

Conley sank back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling.

"It's awful rich," said Hashknife. "Rotten with gold."

"Rotten with gold," echoed Conley. "Crooked gold!"

He lifted himself on his elbow and looked at Moran.

"Remember why I got mad at you, Frank? You cut me out of a deal. Mebby it was business; but that's all

past. You had money; you bought several pieces of property and paid a good price on surface showings, you remember?"

"I did, Mose."

"Oh, I was mad," smiled Conley. "I was hot-headed in those days. I wanted to get even with you; so I blew over a hundred dollars' worth of gold-dust into that rotten, red quartz, with a shotgun. I salted it for you, Frank; but before I got a chance to show it to you, you left the country. I hated you for leaving. I hated what I had done so much that I never even tried to hammer the gold out of that little ledge. And that's what caused all this misery."

"And it's been there over twenty-five years, Mose?"

"Yes, my first and last crooked work."

"Pretty damn good!" exclaimed Mrs. Conley.

"That's right," said Hashknife. "I know how they felt. I had a touch of it myself."

He walked out to the porch and Dawn followed him out.

"Do you realize what you've done today?" she asked.

Hashknife looked at her curiously.

"Aw, I didn't do nothin'," he said slowly. "It just kinda worked out thataway. I think Jimmy's lookin' for you."

As Dawn turned back to the door, Slim Regan stepped out on the porch, his hat tilted forward. He scratched the back of his hat in evident bewilderment.

"I'll be darned," he said slowly. "Lotsa things I don't *sabe* yet, Hartley. You say that Cutter and his gang knowed you was after 'em, and jist the same they go and leave a twenty-two shell layin' around where you could find it."

"They didn't, Slim; I dropped it there myself. Their mistake was in admittin' it."

"F'r gosh sake! And what made you think Jimmy Moran didn't shoot Conley?"

"Because there was two shots fired. Jimmy shot one, but Conley didn't shoot any."

"The hell he didn't? There was an empty shell—"

"But it never was fired in Conley's gun. He always kept the hammer of his gun on an empty shell, Slim. This shell had a queer dent in the primer, so I accidentally fired the gun to see what mark it made. That was the time Horse-Collar and his gang started the trouble. After the gravel in Mallette's boots proved that he'd been dragged, I picked the judge as the killer."

"Detectin'," said Slim slowly, "ain't nothin' but jist common sense, is it?"

"And a lot of luck, Slim."

"Well, I'll be danged!"

Slim went clumping back into the house, anxious to talk.

HASHKNIFE walked out to his gray horse and swung into the saddle. He was just a trifle weary and he wanted to get back to town, but Moran called to him, hurrying down from the rear of the house.

"How much do I owe you, Hartley?" he asked.

"What for?" asked Hashknife blankly.

"For what you've done. I realize it is more than I can ever pay you, but I—"

"Then I'll always have somethin' comin'," grinned Hashknife. "Forget it, Moran. Right now I'm goin' to town and fold myself around some ham and eggs. And then I'll have to tell Sleepy what he missed. So long!"

He rode swiftly away, leaving Moran alone, check-book in hand. Mrs. Conley, Dawn and Pete came out on the porch, looking for Hashknife, but he was far down the road. Moran folded up his check-book and came back to the porch.

"I can't figure him out," said Moran.

"Pretty hard," admitted Pete blankly. "He got me loose."

"He's wonderful," said Dawn.

"Damn right!" said Mrs. Conley emphatically.

Which was all right with Hashknife, as long as he didn't hear what was said.

A sea story of crossed signals and

THE MILLION DOLLAR BOOTS

By Ralph R. Perry

CROSSING the Western ocean in the wintertime, a sailor has to have a pair of boots. Washing down the decks every morning before dawn, when the cold strikes its chillest—frigid steel underfoot and icy water flowing ankle deep—is no job for a barefoot man.

Rubber boots keep out the wet and are cheap; but otherwise they are no good. Leather boots, made with double soles and calfskin uppers, rubbed with dubbing till they are pliable as a glove and shed water in little drops that scoot across the grease—they are the real ticket, but they are hard to come by. In the States they can't be found. In England they cost too much; but in Germany, at the time when a thousand-mark note was small change, there were still a few pair left that had been made for the crews of the *unterseaboten*. Wonderful boots—boots to brag about, to sprawl in a bunk with, and to display where every man-jack in the forecastle could see and envy.

There was just one pair hanging in the window of a little waterfront shop in Bremen. From the other side of the street Sid Roberts spotted them.

"Wow!" he said, and stopped.

The whole starboard watch of the freighter *Monongahela*, ten men, with a two weeks' thirst to quench and real German lager in a saloon four doors ahead, went jostling past before they turned and yelled for him to get wise to himself and snap into it. Sid shook his head. Over his long-lipped Irish face spread an excellent counterfeit of astonishment and chagrin. All at once his swaggering irresponsibility had gone. The way he snatched his cap from the back of his curly black head and jammed it down over his eyes implied that something was very wrong indeed.

"G'wan and lap the Wurzburger, cullies. I got to go back to the ship. All I won in the crap game is still in me work pants. I promised you we'd drink the dough, but I got to get it."

They argued, for in the crap game the

night before Sid had cleaned out the forecastle. But they were thirsty, and they knew Sid wasn't trying to welsh; so they yielded. Sid did go back to the ship, but first he crossed the street, grinning over his own cunning, and bought that pair of boots. He paid dearly because they were the last pair, but they were fine boots. Made for the submarine crews, the storekeeper swore in oily gutturals—the only pair in Bremen. Sid tucked them into his bunk and hastened back to buy the beer and boss the fun. He was only twenty-three, but afloat or ashore he was the leading spirit of the forecastle.

Of the ship's port watch, "Flat Nose" George Amberg was the only sailor to rate liberty. He waddled down the street, narrow forehead wrinkled, thick underlip out-thrust, small eyes glowing red, as the smell of beer and the sound of thickened voices bawling "Darling, I Am Growing Older" reached him from the saloon across the street.

He started to cross. Then, out of the corner of his eye, in a little waterfront shop, he saw a shopkeeper placing in the window one pair of superb leather boots. Because they were the last pair, he paid high for them; and because the sounds from the saloon ahead drew him like a ten-inch hawser, he simply wrapped the boots in paper and carried them along under his arm.

HIS MEMORY of the rest of that night was a blurr. Naked lights and the scrape of fiddles; the stamp of heavy feet dancing with broad-hipped *frauleins;* a raging countenance, crimson with drink, that flung itself upon him; the shock and turmoil of fight; and a long run through dark streets, with two men helping him along.

His next fully conscious impression was the sight of Sid Roberts in the act of thrusting his left foot into a brand new leather boot. The electric light in the forecastle was struggling with the grayness of dawn. Sid was whistling merrily, his head cocked on one side, the better to admire his new purchase. The sound sent blinding jabs of pain through Amberg's aching head. Though every movement hurt, the latter heaved his thick body out of his bunk and towered over the Irishman.

"Wot the hell do yah think yer doin'?" he growled.

Sid stretched out a booted foot and admired it, his head cocked to one side.

"Now don't take your hangover out on *me!*" he retorted briskly. "I'm putting on a pair of boots—the best boots and the last boots in Germany. Don't you wish you had 'em, Flat Nose?"

"M'name's George," Amberg rumbled. "Wish I had 'em, yah mick? Them is mine. I bought the last pair in town, and I weren't so drunk that I don't remember when yah stole 'em."

"Hunh?" said Sid.

But after that first start of unfeigned and incredulous surprize, the expression on his face changed to sarcastic contempt.

"You make out to be tough, but you can't bluff me," he answered. "I bought these boots, and there was just one pair. If you think they're yours, you big squarehead, just try and get 'em!"

Amberg made a lumbering, muscle-bound charge. Sid, smaller, quicker of body and far quicker of brain, expecting just that clumsy rush, slipped aside like a shadow. There was no room to box in the narrow space between the bunk and the mess-table, and the barefaced attempt to bully his boots off his feet made him see red. He had the right boot in his hand. He swung it viciously. The heavy heel struck Amberg over the left ear and dropped him to the deck in a sodden heap.

"You saw that?" Sid called indignantly to the other men in the forecastle. "Back me up with the Old Man that this bimbo tried to swipe me boots. Try to beat me up, will he?"

Wrathfully, Sid stamped up on deck. More slowly, three members of the crew picked up Amberg and carried him aft for medical attention, the two-inch gash in his scalp dripping blood all the way.

Later that day the captain tried to get

to the bottom of the affair, but he was no Solomon, and the evidence was contradictory. The crew had seen Amberg carry something into the saloon that might have been boots wrapped in paper. What had become of the package, no one knew. However, no one had seen Sid buy anything at all; so the skipper logged him a week's wages and warned them both to let the matter drop.

Naturally they did nothing of the kind. Hadn't they bought the last pair of boots in the store? Well, then! The other guy was lying. The storekeeper's cunning that displayed stocks of one item at a time was beyond their comprehension. Amberg waddled sullenly about his work. Sid wore a hard, vicious smile, and his tongue dripped acid.

The seventh day out, while they were painting the steam steering engine-house, he taunted the slow-witted sailor once too often. Amberg laid down his paint brush carefully, then hurled a two-quart pot of paint square at his tormentor's sneering face. It knocked Sid senseless into the port waterways; and, fortunately for him, what the paint did to the clean wooden deck was a sin. Amberg tried to jump on the prostrate figure; but, as he gathered himself for the leap, the outraged chief mate knocked him down and dragged him off to the skipper.

The mate wanted to put him in irons, but all the captain did was to log him a week's pay and suggest that he clean up the mess he'd made, with sand and canvas, on his knees, the chief mate to boss the job with the toe of his boot. Before he'd finished, and before Sid was fit to work, the ship docked at New Orleans. The skipper paid them both off, profanely, and kept Amberg aboard till Sid had been gone for an hour. The skipper congratulated himself that he wouldn't be bothered any more.

If Sid had any sense, the skipper reflected, he would ship out again immediately. He was an irresponsible Irishman, who had too much fun out of life to press the quarrel. Amberg was the sullen, obstinate sort who might—but probably Sid would keep out of his way. As far as the skipper was concerned, the incident was closed. He shrugged his shoulders and went ashore, without one thought of the trouble he might have let loose for some other master mariner.

CAPTAIN ECKFORD, master of the twelve-thousand ton twin-screw freighter *Gettysburg*, was due to sail for Havre in an hour. He had been in a vile temper all the morning, not because seamen were scarce, though he was still short-handed, or from the vexation of getting clearance papers. Indeed, he had had the custom-office pretty much to himself, since his was the only vessel to clear that day. Wounded pride and an unwarranted invasion of a master's rights had set him tramping the bridge and chewing a cigar. His own office had jobbed him.

"Port captain's nephew 'n' owner's pet," he snorted once, loud enough to be overheard. "They're sure I'll find Mr. Gardener a capable mate, are they? I ain't! Want him to have sea experience before he takes up his more important duties in the office, do they? Bah!"

Captain Eckford's mimicry was savage, his disgust violent. He was an irascible, efficient, ambitious man—ambitious enough to control his temper while he sat in the owner's office mumbling "yes" when he longed to shout "no" to nod agreement with the unctuous praise of a gangling, pale-faced young man whom the powers that were had selected to be his second mate. In the owner's office Eckford was a pawn, and was canny enough to act like one; but once back on his own ship's deck he saw no reason to pretend to be pleased.

"Suppose the blamed young fool expects to come aboard the last minute, like a passenger," he growled.

The thought was the only pleasant one that he had entertained that morning, and as time passed and sailing hour came very near, indeed, he began to grin with an incredulous hopefulness. The pilot came aboard. Still no sign of Mr.

Gardener. When a handsome, black-haired young Irishman, wearing a superb pair of leather sea-boots, swaggered over the gangway and deliberately headed for the bridge, Eckford hailed him as the answer to a prayer.

"Looking for a berth, mister?" he called out.

He liked the cut of the newcomer's jib. There was a blue-black discoloration under one eye, and a strangely shaped gash, an arc running across the forehead, but Eckford liked officers with gumption enough to fight. Men who could lead men weren't made of milk and water. While he wondered what strange weapon had cut the stranger's forehead, he chuckled at the thought that the fellow who'd marked him was probably still too badly injured to brag about it.

"Need a quartermaster?" Sid Roberts wanted to know.

The captain beamed.

"Mister, you're in luck," he encouraged. "Times ain't so good now, but this is one cruise you don't have to ship forward. My second mate's laid up, and the job's yours! How's that, now?"

Sid scraped the deck with the toe of a new sea-boot. It was an unheard-of bit of good fortune, for the forecastles that year were full of licensed men. For a second he was ashamed of himself, because of the opportunities he had wasted; yet he had passed them up with his eyes open. When he raised his head, he smiled cynically, worldly wise, as much as to imply that a mate can't be a good fellow aboard ship, that he can't have so much fun on the beach. Skippers had tried to promote Sid before.

"Y'ain't talkin' to me, Captain," he said. "I ain't got no ticket. Quartermaster, or a job swingin' a paint-brush and a broom—that's all I'm lookin' for."

Eckford's face fell, but he was in a mood to snatch at straws.

"You looked like a smart fellow," he insisted. "I can tell by the look of you, you've got the experience and can handle men. If you'd learned navigation now—"

"I can navigate. Was a girl right here in N' Orleans, lived up on North Rampart Street, name of Nora. She made me. We was goin' to get married." Sid blushed slightly. "But she got to bossin' me like we was married already. Y'know how women are, Captain, when they think they own you. I finished school before we had a fuss, but it was too much work to take the exams. I shipped out."

"But hell's bells, man, look at the money you're losing!" exploded the captain. "Where's your ambition, your—"

He was answered by a shrug of dissent.

"A bird with my luck at craps can make more cleaning out the focsle than any second mate draws. I don't want no gold braid, Captain. An A. B.'s pay, and a ship that's a good feeder, and I'll take more jack to the beach than you will.'

"Ever been knifed?" Eckford retorted.

Sid didn't like this slightly veiled accusation that he was a crooked gambler, but he wanted a job and it was policy to assure the skipper that he would be no troublemaker in the forecastle.

"A dumb guy tried to brain me with a paint-pot, but not over the ivories," he responded. "Hell, skipper, the gang'll do more for me than for the bosun. I win it from 'em and spend it on 'em. They like it, an' I like it. I ain't changing yet awhile."

"Well, take your bag and go forward," replied the captain sorrowfully.

The sight of a gangling young man, in a brand new mate's uniform, at the head of the gangway, with a huge flat-nosed sailor in shore clothes, carrying his bag, put an end to his dream of dodging Mr. Gardener.

"We do need two hands."

"Thanks, sir," said Sid, and swaggered off.

Sid was too pleased at besting the skipper in argument to notice that the big sailor had stopped the chief officer. After a few words, ended by a nod from the mate, the big sailor was waddling aft to help with the stern lines. Amberg was seeking his boots with Scandinavian pertinancity, and Sid's trail along the

riverfront in search of a ship had not been very hard to follow.

Each saw the other before the *Gettysburg* had finished backing into the stream and turned her bow downriver. To the left was the crescent sweep of the New Orleans waterfront; a big brick sugar-warehouse with broken windows leering at them from behind the low steel wharf sheds; the white pile of the New Hibernian Bank building, towering twenty stories high in the distance. There was not fifty feet of tawny, eddying water between the ship and the bank, and yet in actuality she had put out to sea as definitely as if the water spread blue and empty to the horizon.

SIDE by side Amberg and Sid worked, battening down hatches. The former smirked and chuckled and slapped his leg. He had cornered his man and was satisfied. Sid was furiously and coldly angry. On the other ship the affair of the boots had been a joke. It had culminated in a murderous assault, but for all that he had borne little ill will. Jokes frequently ended in a blow. But if Amberg thought he had been running away, afraid of a finish fight, the big, flat-nosed slob should have it and be damned to him! There'd be time before they docked at Havre.

Their first chance to exchange a word beyond a mate's hearing came at supper. The crew was around the mess-table, sizing one another up, when Amberg clumped down the ladder. He dropped into a seat opposite Sid and pounded the table with a big dirty fist till the coffee slopped out of the cups and every eye was on him.

"Yah stole them boots yah got on from me," he shouted.

Sid leaned across the narrow table.

"You lie, you squarehead!"

To right and left men moved back to give them room, but Amberg chose to ignore the challenge. He pointed to the scar on Sid's forehead.

"I give him that," he said loudly. "The mate stop me. Next time nobody stop me. I fix him, good and plenty."

Turning to his food, he speared a potato with a fork and downed it in two gulps.

Wondering and disappointed, the other men came back to their seats, a big flaxen-haired Dutchman called Hans setting the example. There is never much talk over the food aboard ship, but that evening the forecastle was silent and eery as a graveyard. Each man knew what was coming some dark night when mates were asleep. The *Gettysburg* had not yet dropped her pilot, but already, for that voyage, they knew her forecastle would not be happy.

Of this Eckford knew nothing. The ship had headed north, till the blue skies and piled white clouds of the Gulf had been left behind. She was bucking a moderate gale from the northeast, off the Grand Banks, a wind that wearied the men with its tossing, its cold, and the continual flurries of snow and freezing rain, before the captain learned that a greater trouble faced him. If the forecastle was sullen, the afterguard was slack.

Gardener had come aboard half drunk. Mates do now and then; there is nothing sinister about liquor drunk ashore. But when, after five days at sea, the second mate had liquor on his breath every night— Eckford had searched the mate's room and found nothing, only to see him two hours later, half drunk and defiant, claiming he'd never touched a drop. The skipper knew that peace of mind was a thing of the past.

That anything more important than the morale of the crew was at stake, however, he did not know. A slack second mate meant a slack crew, and he even blamed Gardener for signs of discontent that actually sprang from the smoldering feud in the forecastle. Yet, beyond hazing the crew in the daytime, he took no precautions. For Gardener to drink when off watch was bad. On a long voyage it might be dangerous, theoretically; but, in the few days required to cross the Western ocean, discipline had no time to relax to the point of peril. So he stormed and cursed Gardener to his face

and behind his back, searched for the mate's source of supply in vain, and then let a bad matter care for itself, feeling he had done his duty.

Sid, who was in Gardener's watch, could not deceive himself so pleasantly. To the Irishman the mate's drinking was a good joke on the skipper. He couldn't see why the other mates didn't follow Gardener's example. If he'd been a mate, he would have, he thought. And when, in the dark, lonely graveyard watch that second mates must stand, the hours from midnight till four A. M., when wind and cold are most intense and to be faced with vital powers at their lowest ebb, Sid saw Gardener leave the windswept starboard wing of the bridge and come into the wheel-house, where there was steam heat, he still grinned to himself.

That was what it was to be an officer. He didn't blame Gardener for getting warm, though when he went to the crow's nest after his trick at the wheel, he wouldn't be able to leave his post because his toes were cold. Gardener lounged for a while by the wheel. Then he drew himself erect, like one who makes a decision, and walked—not out on to the bridge, but inside, into the chart-room. Sid heard the leather settee creak, as the mate settled himself comfortably.

"Wow!" whispered Sid to himself.

It was a clear night, of course. Clear and cold as a jagged icicle. Not many ships pass in mid-Atlantic. Sid peered through the port in front of the wheel into the darkness ahead.

"Can't see nothin' with the binnacle shinin' in my eyes," he complained.

For ten minutes he steered, frowning. No sound from the chart-room, so Sid slipped the wheel into the becket and dodged across to the lookout's voice tube.

"Aye, aye, sor," a voice replied hollowly.

"Say, Hans, keep a damn bright lookout," Sid exhorted in a guarded whisper.

"Aw, who the hell says so?" came the hollow retort. Hans had recognized the voice. "It's too *verdamdt* cold."

Argument was futile. Sid darted back to the wheel and slung the *Gettysburg* back on her course.

"Hans is hunched in the crow's nest keeping out o' the wind," he muttered. "Of course, I can't see nothin'. The old wagon's blind!"

The next day after breakfast Sid beat seven bells out of Hans. The skipper took the accounts of that beating with considerable salt, for he couldn't believe that Hans had been knocked down eleven times, and then knocked out, without having a mark on his face. But all the witnesses agreed that Sid had aimed every blow at the body, even after Hans had ceased to defend himself and wrapped his arms around his belly.

"Why? 'Cause I didn't want to black his sleepy eye, that's why!" Sid snapped at last under cross-examination.

Hans claimed he had been attacked without the slightest provovation, and Sid gave no explanation whatever, even when Eckford suggested that he wouldn't be logged his pay if he'd tell what it was all about.

The graveyard watch the following night was colder than ever. The sky was overcast, and the weather a little thick. There was a mate in the chart-room for four hours, but to the utmost ability of one pair of eyes, the *Gettysburg* was not blind. Hans preferred to face the wind at night to Sid's fists in the morning.

Sid came off watch with his teeth chattering and his eyes reddened by the wind, yet despite his physical discomfort, he seemed proud and pleased with himself when he joined Hans in a galley for a cup of coffee before turning in.

"God, Hans, I never knew a guy could git so tired jest lookin'," he confided wearily. "But at that, ain't it fun?"

The other edged warily out of arm's reach.

"*Verdamdt* cold."

"Aw, go blow on yer little tootsie wootsies," Sid glared. "Ye never piped that ship tonight till she was within four miles, and yah oughta see 'em five. Get me?"

Hans grunted, and moved farther away still.

"Yeah, I'll knock the tar out of ye again, if I catch ye dozin', but if ye look at it right, it is kind of fun," Sid went on, "bein' up there alone, with the ship swingin' back and forth, everybody asleep, and you knowin' the whole kaboodle depends on you. It's hard work, but I kinda get a kick out of it. Kinda waitin' and wonderin' what'll turn up, and what you'll do if it does. Makes ye forget the cold."

"Mate's work," Hans growled.

"Say, feller, you said it!" Sid exclaimed, and became thoughtful. "I am kind of actin' mate, ain't I? Maybe—" Sid paused.

He had been about to say that maybe he had been a fool not to take an examination for a license when he had a chance, but he interrupted himself and grinned somewhat defiantly.

"Aw, mates can't have no fun ashore," he declared. "Though, with a dumbbell like that squarehead trailin' round howling for his boots, the beach ain't what it used to be."

"Them goot boots. German boots," Hans nodded, glancing at Sid's feet.

GOOD boots they were, dry and warm in any weather. When Sid turned out for the graveyard watch four days later, he was glad he had them to shove his feet into, even though they had already cost him a crack over the head and the certainty of a finish fight some time in the near future.

In the next two hours the acting mate of the mid-watch faced a spell of duty that would worry a veteran watch officer. Eckford had told Gardener that at three A. M. he figured they would sight Ushant light, and asked him to call him an hour before. He would take the bridge himself, while the *Gettysburg* was making her landfall on the French coast.

However, for the first two hours of the mid-watch, the ship would be running up to the entrance of the English Channel, where there are always plenty of ships running on a dozen courses instead of the fixed directions prescribed by the steamer lanes on the high seas. A watch officer can cross the Atlantic half a dozen times and never change the course to avoid another ship; if he comes on to the French coast without running risk of a collision at least twice in his watch, he is lucky.

The small fishing smacks out of Brest are the worst; they wait till they're nearly under the bow before they show a flare. Lots of them are drifters, with a quarter of a mile of net dragging to windward, to foul an unwary mate's propeller.

Sid took the first lookout himself, sending Hans to the wheel. By two Eckford would have the deck, and he hoped that, for once, Gardener would stand his watch in the open. It was the worst night of the voyage, and Sid doubted it. He started to climb the ladder to the crow's nest in his new seaboots, a little excited over his self-assumed responsibility.

He was not the only nervous man. The third mate, who had the preceding watch, had fretted himself into hysteria and ended by losing his head completely. About eleven o'clock, Amberg, slow as usual, had been unpardonably late in reporting the lights of an approaching ship. When he signaled the bridge at last, the third mate, who hadn't sighted the ship either, relieved his overstrained nerves by a five-minute bawling out that would have been a credit to a stevedore foreman. To edge his profanity, he snapped out that to open Amberg's eyes he could damn well stay on watch an extra half hour. The punishment is not common in the merchant service, though usual in the navy. Ordinarily Amberg would have protested; but as it happened, the excuse to stay on deck suited him well.

And then, when Gardener came up, blinking, to relieve the third, the latter forgot all about it. There was a ship in sight, and he was so anxious to turn over the deck properly that he forgot the lookout.

"'Right. She's mine, mister," Gardener grunted, and started in the wheelhouse.

"No, not yet." The third caught his relief by the sleeve. "Wait a second till your eyes get used to the dark. Hell of a night, isn't it? That ship about a mile away's crossing our bows, but just before this rain shut down, I got a glimpse of a masthead light off to starboard. Think I did, anyhow," the youngster chattered apologetically. "With this rain in my face, I been seeing things that wasn't there for the last hour."

"Aw right," Gardener grunted. "I got her."

"Well—she's yours, mister," the third acknowledged with a long sigh of relief, and ducked below out of the wet.

Meanwhile Sid had climbed to the rim of the crow's nest, rather surprized that the other man hadn't met him half-way down the ladder.

"Get out o' my way, Flat Nose; it's eight bells," he snapped.

Amberg growled that a damned mate had ordered him to stay where he was till one bell. Sid promptly crowded in the tiny shelter. He suggested that Amberg beat it—in the rain no one would know. Actually Sid couldn't do his work with the Swede's thick body wedging him against the mast. Amberg merely grunted and stayed where he was. For ten minutes the two swung back and forth pendulumwise to the roll of the ship.

"Say, look half a point to starboard! Ain't that a light?" Sid demanded suddenly. "Look, you Dutchman! It was red, too—by God, I swear it was red! We'll have to dodge her, and there won't be much time—"

With a wrench of his shoulders Amberg turned in the narrow space till he faced Sid breast to breast.

"Now," he muttered, "thief, you pay for my boots!"

A hand, big and hard as a caulking mallet, caught Sid by the throat. The first clutch of it turned him dizzy with pain and shut off his breath.

He clawed at Amberg's wrist. He kicked at his shins. He tried to cry out, but the space was too small for an effective blow. His shouts were choked to hoarse gasps before they crossed his lips. To Amberg, chuckling as Sid writhed and kicked, the struggles, the popping eyeballs, the gasps, were evidences of terror—the strategy of his attack.

It was not so. No human enemy made Sid claw with his fingernails at an iron hard wrist, like a panic-stricken woman. It was the sight of two lights that stabbed through the mist and hurtled down on the *Gettysburg*. White and red at first; then to the left a third light, green, came into sight. Bow on, a ship was coming toward them. She would strike unless they changed course. Gardener was in the chart-room; the helmsman had his nose struck in the binnacle light; Amberg's back was turned, and his grip on Sid's throat was unshakable. Sid struggled, and Amberg went on chuckling in his ear.

The lights seemed to rise up as the ship approached. Sid saw the dark hull below them, the whiteness where her bows cut the water. Only seconds remained to act, if a collision were to be averted. He sobbed. Then, as his senses reeled, he knew a second's hope. The ship had blown two blasts—the signal to pass to starboard. He heard the door to the bridge slam. That was Gardener. He watched the three lights that Gardener would see now—the mate would never know the other side had been crossing his bow, not meeting him head on. From the *Gettysburg's* whistle came one blast; she lurched as the wheel went hard a-port.

It was the abysmal error of crossed signals and wrong orders.

The rest was an onrushing bow and a booming impact cut by the scream of steel plates ripped apart. The *Gettysburg* was rammed in two. For an instant the two ships clung together; then the big seas twisted the stranger's battered bow out of a twenty-foot chasm in her side. In the moment of silence that followed the stunning reverberations of the collision a voice cried out from the opposite bridge.

"Damn you! Oh, damn you! Now you've done it!" it called in agony.

The shock, totally unexpected, made Amberg drop his hands and stare.

"That's for my boots," Sid panted, and swung with all strength to the point of the unprotected jaw. Amberg collapsed across the edge of the crow's nest. He was still hanging limply there when Sid climbed down the ladder and picked his way across the riven deck. Sid looked up.

"Damn your soul!" he said between his teeth, and hastened aft, where Eckford was already busy launching lifeboats.

A stream of half-clad men were running in that direction. No one had stopped to dress, or to inquire whether the ship were to be abandoned. No sailor who had felt that crash, or the gallied roll of the deck under foot, as the sea flooded the hold, needed orders.

The dynamos had stopped. Roaring steam, as the engineer tried to blow his boilers before the inrushing sea exploded them, drowned Eckford's voice. In his hands he had a flash that cast a hard circle of light on the confusion; he was swinging its beam from boat to davit to indicate his commands.

It is a bitter thing to lose a ship. A ship dies like a valiant living creature, gasping for breath. To feel responsible for the loss is appalling. Sid's footsteps dragged across the deck. He hated to face Eckford, but the men were taking their places in the boat; at last he stepped into the light.

Eckford stepped swiftly to his side, put his lips against Sid's ear.

"You're the lookout?" he snapped.

Sid nodded. The captain gave him one straight, uncomprehending glance; the flashlight beam danced toward the boat.

"Then you're the last. In with you!" ordered the captain.

Gardener's pasty face was thrust between them.

"That's him. He never sighted her," he stammered.

Eckford thrust him back.

"You crossed your signals—and I know why!" Sid heard him say, for the roar of the steam was dying down. "You've done all you can do for tonight, mister. Into the boat and save your breath for the inquiry. Thank God it's no worse—no lives lost. Your watch is here. Focsle and quarters are empty."

Sid stood stock still.

"Into the boat with you, lookout!" Eckford snapped.

Sid hesitated, then shook his head.

"He don't know," he answered. "I'm acting mate. There's still a man in the crow's nest. I'm going back for him."

Eckford's eyes blinked with surprize, but his decision was instant. He pushed Gardener into the boat.

"Toss out three life-preservers, one of you," he said. "Take my flash. This ship's sinking. Lower away, and pull clear of the suction. If there's time I'll call you back, and we'll jump. If not, pick us up if you can." To Sid he added one word. "Go!"

The *Gettysburg* was settling by the head. Below, Sid heard a bulkhead crumple under the pressure, as he started forward. He tried to run, but jagged barriers of iron lay across the dark decks, to trip him and gouge his shins. The foremast was tottering: it took all Sid's strength to drag Amberg's thick body from the crow's nest and carry him down the ladder. He did it somehow, but when he reached Eckford's side again, he let the limp burden fall heavily to the deck.

"Pity I can't drown him," he said, and dropped to a sitting posture.

"Pity you can't," Eckford answered. "After what Hans yelled in my ear, there's a man I'd like to throw over the side myself. But—what are you doing?"

"Throwing away these damn boots that sunk a million dollar ship."

"Bosh!" said Eckford. "Landsmen wrecked us. Those boots made a seaman of you. Pull 'em on, and let's get out of here."

The Dubasher

BY CAPTAIN MANSFIELD

THE Dubasher of East Indian ports is the native agent who purchases your food supplies. Anything else from the Kohinoor to a dozen monkey eggs he will obtain, or something just as good, when once you are firmly enmeshed in his net.

For some dark and mysterious reason the newly arrived ship's agents, instead of looking out for the ship's personnel, appoint this highly efficient brigand, the Dubasher, for this purpose.

The Dubasher views the puny efforts of his brother fakirs with scorn and contumely. How can lying naked on a bed of up-ended spikes, he reflects, compare with looking a ship's master in the eye and selling him hardtack enough to last him three voyages around the world. Or producing a plant out of thin air and watching it grow— All bunk, he undoubtedly tells himself.

"I materialize a Burma ruby out of colored glass and sell it for many rupees."

In all tales of pirates and buccaneers there is no mention of Dubashers. Such tales are flat when one considers what might be gained by having a Dubasher for a hero. Even Webster ignores the Dubasher in his dictionary, but has for our edification many other words that inadequately describe him. Machiavellian gives one a faint idea of the Dubasher's merits. Added to that is a long list from rogue to porch-climber and yegg, until you get down to what the boatswain called him, and that would not do to print. If all these words could be coined into one it would not wholly describe the Dubasher, there would be something lacking.

The Dubasher emulates the early bird, a free breakfast being his particular worm as he rides along the Midan in his squeaking surrey to the river moorings of the ship he has in mind. Watching from the ship's deck, you think at first that your eyes are deceiving you, that no such dilapidated contraption could possibly sway along the road and remain intact.

The horse stops and the Dubasher climbs out backward. Then you see what causes the pleading expression of the horse's face as he looks back. The Dubasher speaks to his driver and points at it. It is a wisp of wilted yellow grass tied to a rear spring of the surrey.

Coming up the gangway, encouraging and threatening a small boy stumbling under bundles, is the Dubasher. All smiles and smirks is that worthy as he orders the boy to unload his bundles of bottles and cigar boxes at your feet

"Salaam, sar, a small present for you this morning, sar."

You nod, trying to look stern and uncompromising as you realize that his *cumshaw* will have to be paid for one way or another in large commissions on the commodities he has to sell or in the other kinds of graft he is so proficient in.

In one case a Dubasher sold some anti-leaking compound to Captain Oldtoby in Madras, and when the skipper came out of his trance he sued to recover the amount paid for the compound.

Testimony developed that the compound was nothing more or less than a box full of ants. The idea was that when the ship was rolling and the seams opened up, all the skipper had to do was to throw some ants overboard and they would crawl into the seams and stop the leakage.

After much controversy the skipper won his case, but then the Dubasher sued for the return of his compound. That Captain Oldtoby could not manage, for the compound had leaked from the box and was safely ensconced in the ship's supply of sugar.

Many and devious are the ways of a Dubasher.

A Story of Civil War Spies

AT LASKER'S LANDING

By Hugh Pendexter

WHEN General Halleck, in the fall of 1861, succeeded General Hunter as commander of the new Department of Missouri, there was a tightening of authority. Radical orders were issued to General Curtis, the provost marshal of St. Louis, to prevent the continual flow of information to the Confederate Army, and to allow no more fugitives to enter, or remain inside, the lines. Those detected in furnishing information to the enemy were to be shot. The worthless element, incapable of loyalty to any cause, feared they must seek new haunts.

However, neither the prospect of imprisonment, nor of forced flight, could dull the interest of the waterfront in the recently arranged duel between Jim Bell and Dandy Graham. The meeting place was Gambit's Tavern, by the river, and the weapons consisted of a deck of playing cards and big table stakes. It was a case of dog eat dog, or Greek against Greek.

Those who had lived their lives in the Mississippi valley championed Bell. This was to be expected, as he was a product of the river and famous from Cairo to New Orleans for his supremacy at poker.

Those less sectional in bias—and they were in the minority—looked with favor on Graham. He was a newcomer, having exercised his talents mostly in Kentucky, and Virginia. He had won popular indorsement by issuing the challenge to Bell in the barroom of the St. Charles. This audacity spoke well for him as a sportsman. His nickname had evolved from the elegance of his attire and from his polished manners. It was obvious to the more discerning that he could work his way into the best social circles of the river towns and remain unsuspected, if he so wished, of being a professional gambler. He was a newcomer, and had not had time to create a background.

Bell was a gambler's gambler. His handsome, reckless face was known in every dive up and down the valley. He was a very adroit fellow with lethal weapons. He could win a woman or a jack-pot by finesse, or sheer audacity, or clinch his argument with bowie-knife and pistol. Many of the yarns about him were apocryphal; no man, in three or four years of notoriety, ever could have been in so many places and have countered so many spectacular coups.

Graham was an unknown quantity. He intrigued the imagination, not from what he was known to have done, but because of a belief in his possibilities when put to the supreme test. Instead of several years in the valley, he had been in St. Louis scarcely more than a month. Yet he had flashed brilliantly here and there. He was said to have come from a famous Southern family.

Bell, returned from downriver, had scarcely had time to learn of this new rival, before Graham searched him out and publicly challenged him. Bell had planned to be the challenger; this move of Graham's established another river-front idol. Bell's adherents were divided in their estimate of Graham. One faction said he was a gentleman who had slipped; the other insisted that he was an upstart who hankered to be a gentleman, but could not climb higher than fine manners and fine clothes.

THIS encounter at cards vastly interested the lower level of society. Some people are concerned almost wholly with the minutiæ of life. That element was deaf to the big guns, roaring in Virginia, and was more excited about the meeting of the two sharpers than it was in what the new man, Grant, proposed to do as a soldier.

As in any other duel, each man was to have a friend present. These seconds were to stand behind the players. As the contest was to take place in a private room, the public was barred. This had been insisted upon by Graham. Yet the curious crowd in Gambit's big barroom found nerve-tingling dramatic values in waiting to behold the victor come down the wide stairway. What was happening in that closed room, one flight up? The more optimistic expected the quiet of the upper floor to be riddled by shots.

Watching the soldiers drill at Camp Jackson was tame sport compared to this eager listening. The crowd had collected early, and Gambit had profited by a big bar trade, since the two gamblers entered the room, saluted coldly, and went up the stairs, followed by their seconds.

To the old-timers the notion that Graham aspired to be mistaken for a gentleman was against him. A gentleman was born to his station. One could not become a gentleman by any amount of polish. At least, that was the belief on the river, from St. Louis down. Graham's champions insisted that he was born a gentleman; they cited as proofs the elegance of his personal appearance and the easy grace of his deportment.

Bell was less restrained. He was a prodigal. He was a boon companion at times; occasionally he was self-indulgent. He was as handsome as he was reckless, but at no time did he attempt to conceal his tiger stripes. No one could be more open-handed in taking a drink at a public bar; the whole world was welcome to drink with him. Bell gave himself along with his money. He was the host of the ne'er-do-well whom he treated.

Graham was something of a renegade

to the world that filled his pockets. He could, and did, scatter money lavishly, but there was no fellowship in the gesture. His favors were bestowed much as a man gives alms.

Three times a servant had carried two drinks up the stairs. This was indicative of a stern battle, with only the lookouts imbibing. The waiter was pounced upon and elevated to new importance every time he returned to the bar. How was the game faring? Who was ahead? The fact that the waiter had been turned back at the door did not prevent him from capitalizing the importance of his position.

Bell seemed to be a bit ahead. Bell had ceased to smile. Graham done rake in a mighty big pot. Seemed to be about even. These verbal bulletins kept the betting up to a feverish pitch. It was commonly believed that each man was waiting for an opportunity to clean up on one play. The final show-down might come any minute.

Shortly after this report there was great alarm and excitement. Suddenly, a file of soldiers had entered the big room. Bayonets glittered ominously. A glance at the sergeant's grim visage revealed that these were not thirsty bluecoats, come for liquid rations. They moved with the precision of an inexorable machine. Those nearest the file recalled Halleck's drastic orders and edged backward to efface themselves. But even as the sergeant came through the doorway, Gambit whispered to the colored boy to be ready. The sergeant, who had more than once patronized the bar, eyed the proprietor stonily and announced:

"I'm after two men. Names, Bell and Graham. Are they in this house?"

Before he had finished the question, the boy was vanishing down the dark hall that led through the dining-room to the back of the house.

Gambit fought for precious seconds by simulating stupidity and amazement. With mouth agape he stared at the sergeant. It would require but a moment for his guests to slip through the window and on to the veranda roof. To gain further time he slowly came from behind the bar and slowly made his way through the group. He did not speak until he stood close to the sergeant. Then he dully said:

"Bell and Graham? Jim Bell and Dandy Graham?"

"Yes, I'm waiting."

"For goodness' sake, what can you want of them, Sergeant?" cried old Gambit.

"Never mind what I want them for! Answer my question!"

The colored boy was fleet of foot in a supreme effort to serve Jim Bell, his idol.

Gambit believed that the word had been delivered. Yet he fenced for another inch of time.

"The two gentlemen, as you may have heard, came here to play a game of cards. I hope, Sergeant, the provost marshal won't have it in for me because they happened to select my house for their game. Every officer in St. Louis—and most of them have been in here—knows I run a clean, orderly place."

"I'm not after you; I'm after those two men. Where are they?"

"One flight up. They went up alone. I told them to take any empty room."

The sergeant barked an order, and his file followed him, to clump heavily up the stairs. The crowd began to thin out. Only those who had great confidence in their reputations remained to witness the denouement.

One citizen whispered to Gambit—

"If the provost sent for them, it may be a bad ending to their card-playing."

"Be an awful blow to the name of my house," shivered Gambit. "If they'd only played last night! Bell was planning to pull out right after the game was finished." Then more optimistically he continued, "Well, we'll hope for the best." He faced the stairs, as the tramping of feet sounded in the hall above.

The file of soldiers, led by the sergeant, came down the stairs. They were bringing two men, and old Gambit raised a hand to hide his smile. The

prisoners were the lookouts. The sergeant halted the file and told Gambit:

"I found these men in a room playing cards. And two glasses. You said Graham and Bell were there. What do you mean?"

"I said they went up the stairs to play, sir. That is, they told me they wanted a room to play in. My waiter has served drinks, only two at a time, but he was not allowed to enter the room. I supposed Bell and Graham were there. They haven't passed out the front of the house."

"They never stopped upstairs. Just cleared out the back way," said the sergeant. "Well, I'll take these in to the marshal, although I came for wolves, not sheep." Then the order to march, and the file passed out.

The barroom eagerly discussed which genius was astute enough to leave the lookouts at the table to delay the search. It smacked much of Jim Bell's quick wit. Gambit discovered the colored lad lurking in the darkened hall and called him forward. In answer to questions the boy reported that he had barely thrust his head into the room to give warning before both men rose as one and were slipping through the open window on to the veranda roof. It was Dandy Graham, said the boy, who softly called back for the two seconds to pick up the cards and commence playing.

"Graham, eh?" mused a citizen. "And I'd laid a bet it would 'a' been Jim. Hope they git clear. But the town must be sealed up, if the provost marshal wants 'em bad. Wonder what they're wanted for?"

This phase of the interrupted duel worried old Gambit. Why should the Federal Government want either of the men? Gambit had accepted them as reckless demigods, who had no concern as to the outcome of the terrible strife now ripping the nation from coast to coast. Gambit's sympathies were with the Confederacy. But neither North nor South should expect men like Bell and Graham to adore more than their particular god, that of chance.

The incident stirred a maggot of fear into worrying the old man's mind. The gamblers were about all that were left of the old river life. Regardless as to which side won the war, life would not be worth living. Gambit knew no world outside the Mississippi Valley. When two such prime favorites could be driven from the river by the bayonets of the provost marshal guard, the end of all things was at hand. He did what he seldom did during rush hours. He poured himself a long drink of Bourbon County, Kentucky, whisky and drank it as a sorrowful toast to the departed days.

LASKER'S LANDING on the Kentucky shore and a dozen miles below Hickman was dreary and desolate. It was one of several inhabited spots in a wide area of sunken lands that not only characterized that part of Kentucky but also the northwestern corner of Tennessee. The overflow from the Ohio and the Mississippi annually flooded long stretches of the forlorn country and left it, in the dry seasons, a land of stagnant lakes, deep morasses and drowned timber.

Canebrake flourished and, in high water, skiffs passed over the tops of the luxuriant growth. When the rivers were down, the brakers used the winding paths made by cattle to pass from one unmapped little community to another. The abundance of game and fish attracted a population peculiar to the monotonous environment. These people, although within a few miles of such towns as Hickman and Union City, were isolated from the outside world.

The inhabitants were underprivileged. They reflected their environment. They were ignorant; some were brutal. The men were tall, loose-jointed and dyspeptic. The women were tall, thin and round-shouldered. The prime requisites for living in the cane were whisky, snuff, hog and hominy. The people might even be considered as lost folks. Excelling in woodcraft and being born marksmen, they spent their lives in hunting and fishing and in looking after their few poor

cattle. They could travel seventy or more miles and be out of touch with the world. Sheriffs' writs in corners of two States had small success, once a fugitive escaped into the blind maze of cattle paths and extensive swamps.

Several families living at Lasker's Landing forgot their dyspepsia and fever and ague late one forlorn November afternoon, when a skiff came down the muddy current and landed. Fugitives were not welcome among the brakers. The people were not criminally inclined; and visitors who were outside the law invited the coming of officers.

By the time Graham and Bell had hauled the skiff half-way up the fifteen-foot rise, the men and women on the veranda of the long log house knew that two men must be fugitives from justice. No human beings, wearing such wonderful clothing, could have any legitimate business at the landing. Their arrival presaged a blundering pursuit.

The gamblers surveyed the silent group and then gazed about to get the lay of the land. Their view was foreshortened. Back of the house was a forest of cornstalks, tall and thick; an excellent cover for any one withdrawing from the river in a hurry. Beyond the cornstalks, fifty yards from the house, was a ragged fence. Beyond the fence was the tall and seemingly impenetrable cane.

"Lonely looking enough," mused Graham.

"Appeals to me a heap more than being the guest of the provost marshal," said Bell. "Looks worse to you than it does me, as I had expected to come here. I knew about how it would appear. Even if the soldiers hadn't come I should have started for here, as soon as our game was finished. Hey, you folks! Who's got your tongues?"

A sallow-faced woman laughed shrilly. The men stared somberly. A barefoot girl, scarcely sixteen, advanced to the edge of the veranda. She was graceful as any wild creature, and pretty. The cane women were sometimes like that in their adolescence. Premature mating and a frugal mode of living and snuff-dipping, speedily stripped them of youth and left them sallow. The girl boldly challenged:

"Who might you two be, comin' a-trippin' down the river, dressed bent for a marryin'? What sheriff's a-taggin' after you?"

The men grinned a bit dourly at this. Libbie Jinks was a smart talker. She could make towners sit up and take notice. Bell, always interested in pretty women, quickly advanced to act the spokesman. His handsome face was wreathed in smiles. He stood close to the veranda, took the girl's hands in his and beamed into her bold young eyes. He explained:

"No sheriff chases Jim Bell. I have the freedom of the whole river. This other man is Dandy Graham. We want to look this country over a bit. We'll be here only for a day or two. We pay well. Tell us, little one, where we can sleep and be fed."

Libbie Jinks made no move to remove her brown hands. The gambler's smooth, white hands, unstained by tan, were entirely different from the calloused, sunburned hands of the brakers. Bell released her, as Graham came forward and with awesome grace removed his stovepipe hat and bowed ceremoniously. She found him as pleasing in externals as his companion, but she sensed a reserve in his bearing which she resented. She pointed at him, bowing before her, and called out to the silent group on the veranda:

"Lor'! Look at that now!"

A tall, lanky youth dropped from the veranda and seized the girl by the shoulder and roughly yanked her back from the men; and glowering at Bell, he said:

"You folks git to be knowin' us folks too quick. We don't know you. We don't want to know you."

An older man called out:

"Don't git brash, Toss. If that feller's name's Bell, he's the critter t'other feller talked about as likely to come here."

"I'm Jim Bell. I expect to meet a man

here. Where is he?" quickly asked the gambler.

"Hidin' in back, stranger. Reckon he's lookin' for a law-officer to come after him."

"No, no. The law doesn't want him, nor me. He's waiting to meet me. Some of you take word to him to come here. Tell him Jim Bell's waiting for him."

He tossed a silver dollar on the veranda; it was quickly pocketed. The lucky man started at once around the house and disappeared in the cornstalks. As Bell made for the veranda, Graham detained him and turned aside with him to whisper:

"Didn't know you had any one planted down here, Bell. You didn't mention it when you suggested this place."

"Man I've known for some time. He had to skip out from St. Louis. Said he was coming here. I knew I'd be coming here mighty soon. Told him to wait for me."

"Sure he's a friend?"

"Think I'm a fool? Now we're here, where do you plan to go?"

"Up north if I can get behind the army. I'm at home in big cities. Can't go back to Virginia. New York's a likely place to hide in. I'd die in a hell of this kind." And he grimaced in disgust, as he stared about the ugly opening.

"I can make myself at home and be comfortable almost anywhere," said Bell, as his gaze wandered to pick out Libbie Jinks, "but it should be easy for you to work north. Hickman's near. From there you can reach the Ohio without being picked up. A month later it may be more of a job. But easy now. Once on the Ohio, you can lose yourself. To hell with the army! You can go through it like flies through an open door."

"I was getting to like St. Louis," mused Graham, "but that town's too risky now."

Bell smiled, and assured:

"If you'll stick around this landing for a week or so, I reckon you can return to St. Louis without sweating a hair. I could pick you up here as I plan to go back. Then we can finish that game."

"You'll come back here and return with me if it's safe?"

"Oh, it'll be safe when I go back. The Yankees will have something else to think about. I've got to run down into southern Tennessee on business. Then I'll return."

"Well, if that's the case, maybe I'll try to hang on. First thing is a place to sleep and something to eat. These people don't seem to fancy us."

"That's because we're different. They're ignorant and suspicious. I'll try them again."

He turned and started for the veranda steps, but the young man who seemed to have a proprietary interest in the Jinks girl, jumped from the platform, barred his advance and fiercely declared:

"You folks ain't wanted here. Git into that skiff 'n' go down or up. Go to hell! Only start your boots now."

Bell ignored him and asked of the onlookers—

"Who lives in this house?"

"Three famblies live in it," some one replied.

"What family lives nearest the door?"

"My ma 'n' me, mister," spoke up Libbie Jinks.

A sallow woman listlessly added:

"That's right, mister. Me 'n' the gal have the door end of this shack. My old man's off moonin' round some'r's."

"Then, Mrs. Jinks, my friend and I want a place to sleep and something to eat for a day or two. We'll make it worth your while." He rattled some coins in his pocket."

The woman snuffed and stared doubtfully at young Toss, who continued blocking the gambler's path.

"I dunno, mister," she began. "Toss there is settin' up with my gal, Libbie. He gets mighty pestiferous if 'nother as much as looks at her."

Toss hugged in his chin and dropped a hand on a butcherknife, worn without a sheath on his hip. He told Bell:

"Ma Jinks said a true word. I'm pestiferous as hell, mister! If you ain't

afloat inside a minute, I'll see the color of your blood."

Bell's left hand darted forward, knocking off the ragged skin hat and grabbing stoutly into the light yellow hair. At the same instant his right hand whipped out a bowie-knife; and, with the point at the young man's throat, he growled:

"How much longer are you going to bother me?"

Toss did not move, except to drop his hand to his side. He said nothing, but a great fear filled his pale blue eyes. Bell correctly diagnosed his perturbation and, smiling slightly, he said:

"That's better, much better. Don't get in my way again." And he spun him about and gave him a push.

Toss hurried around the end of the house. The group on the veranda quickly melted away; and Mrs. Jinks, retiring indoors, dragged her daughter after her. With a light laugh Bell told his companion:

"They're cattle. That's the way you must treat them. But the girl's likely looking."

"Scarcely more than a child," mused Graham.

"You must catch 'em young in this hole, or you'll find a hag," murmured Bell.

Then he stared at the house, whence came the sound of Mrs. Toss' monotonous voice and the shrill tones of her daughter. The latter was in rebellion.

"Old lady's keeping the girl a prisoner," remarked Bell.

"But she is so young," Graham reminded.

Bell sensed indirect criticism this time. He sharply demanded—

"Are you her guardian?"

Graham shrugged his shoulders and, without speaking, ascended the steps to the veranda. Frowning heavily, Bell followed him. Mrs. Jinks appeared in the doorway and told them—

"If you can put up with what we have, I reckon you can stop a bit—that is, if young Toss don't go to cuttin' up capers."

"He'll behave," quietly assured Bell.

He pushed the woman aside and entered the house. Graham followed him. The place was not inviting. Blankets and hides were stretched across the long room to divide it into three sections. The tenants must pass through the Jinks section, as there was but the one door. One could enter through the windows, however, as the windows were but square holes, without glass or sashes. A rude bed and box-bunk and three chairs made from barrels and the fireplace comprised the furnishings of bedroom, living room and kitchen. Mrs. Jinks raked the ashes from the fireplace coals and set on a skillet of pork to fry.

Unnoticed by Bell the girl stepped through a window. Bell turned from surveying the supper preparations and did not see her. He stepped outside, followed by Graham and glanced about.

"That young baggage invites me to give chase, but where is she?" he said.

"Forget about that youngster, Bell," urged Graham. "The men I've seen are just the kind to pot you from behind a tree. Can't be any law down here."

"We don't want any law down here," roughly replied Bell. "People here are sheep. Are you concerned because you're afraid of being potted, or from fear that innocence will be injured?"

"Well, I'd be ashamed to be wiped out by any of these louts."

The girl came around the house and up the veranda steps, a deep color staining her plump cheeks, as she halted and stared oddly at Bell. He passed his arm around her slim waist and inquired—

"Where's the young fire-eater?"

"Dunno. Don't care."

"Bell, you make me blush. You cover me with confusion," sighed Graham. "When do you pull out?"

"When my friend, hiding in back, shows up. Probably tomorrow."

As he spoke, he continued staring down into the girl's face. She whispered something. His gaze brightened and he nodded in acquiescence. Then he gave the girl a squeeze and a push and dismissed her. He faced Graham and said—

"Quite sure I shall go tomorrow."

GRAHAM paced to the end of the veranda and motioned for Bell to follow him. Bell did so, his dark eyes questioning. Graham bluntly told him:

"That girl's mind hasn't formed. It's on par with the mind of a child of eight."

"Is this a lecture or a sermon?" coldly asked Bell. "Just what are you driving at?"

"Well, I know you're planning to take that child with you," hesitatingly replied Graham.

Bell stared at him steadily and softly replied:

"If she lives to be a hundred she won't know any more than she knows now. She wants me to take her along, and I'm going to do it. Anything more to say?"

"Only that it's disgusting."

"Damn! See here, Graham, we don't like each other. In St. Louis we felt the river was too small for us. If the provost marshal hadn't been after the two of us, I should have traveled here alone. I don't know what old Curtis wants you for, but the fact he does want you made me forget that we crowd each other. But we don't like each other. You challenged me to that game, because you didn't like me. I don't like you. I don't like the talk you've been making."

"Well, well. Let's not quarrel," murmured Graham in a conciliatory voice. "You'll go tomorrow, and I'll hunt for a path out of this hell-hole that leads to some settlement."

Bell stared in amazement at what he believed to be a confession of cowardice. Then his thin lips slowly parted in a grin, and a feral light blazed in his eyes. But despite the grin, his face was hard with a sudden fixed purpose. He told Graham:

"If I find you on the river when I get back, we'll be bumping into each other. We'll take a walk up that path back of the house."

Graham drew back a step and whispered—

"What do you mean—take a walk?"

"Plain English," gritted Bell. "Two men go walking; one man comes back."

"Why, Bell! What mad nonsense!"

"Hell! Everything I say or do seems to strike you as being nonsense!" hoarsely exclaimed Bell. "I won't stand for it. The river isn't big enough for the two of us. You got on my nerves, when you blew into St. Louis and let on you were cock of the walk. You had the gall to challenge me to that poker game. Perhaps you'd rather walk down by the skiff. None of these sheep will interfere."

Graham sat down on the edge of the veranda and with a spotless handkerchief began rubbing mud from what had been highly polished boots. Bell stared down at him and the fierce grin returned. He dropped to the ground and stared into Graham's face. Graham did not meet his gaze, but continued rubbing his boots. Yet he felt the impact of the steady gaze and at last muttered:

"Oh, forget it. Let's eat and sleep. As for this river, I have no love for it. I prefer cities farther east. Plenty of room for the two of us. Take the river and welcome."

"You damn coward!" whispered Bell. "To think you was that, and yet ran that bluff on me in St. Louis! I think I will slap your face."

He waited. Graham would not look at him, but kept on rubbing his boots. But he did say:

"I won't fight, no matter what you do. In town, with white men looking on, maybe yes. But not down here, where, as you say, they're only cattle."

"You'd run a bluff on Jim Bell!" hissed the gambler, and his open hand smacked the clean-shaven cheek.

Graham gave a convulsive start, then went limp. Bell looked closer and laughed in derision.

"Shedding tears! You miserable imitation of a man! I'll give five thousand dollars to find you in the St. Charles or old Gambit's, when I return to town. With a crowd looking on!"

Graham would not meet his gaze, nor did he speak. Bell hopped up on the veranda and, still laughing, swaggered toward the door. The girl met him in the doorway, and her shrill voice carried far

over the marsh as she admiringly cried:

"You're a master hand at having your own way. But I didn't reckon that feller'd be 'fraid of you."

"All sheep are afraid of me, little girl."

Mrs. Jinks soon came out and stood behind Graham and advised—

"You skin out, stranger." He was quick to notice that she had dropped the "mister." She continued, "You ain't got 'nough guts, even for Lasker's Landing. An' the Lawd knows we're sort o' onery in these parts. Take the boat 'n' go. I can't take you in. I'll fetch your pork 'n' pone out here. I'd do that for a dawg."

She left him, and he ceased his polishing long enough to shift to the end of the veranda to get away from the laughing girl now at the window. Several men came down the path and noticed him sitting on the edge of the platform, his arms resting on his knees. One asked—

"Fever or ager, mister?"

"Just tired," said Graham.

"He's had his face slapped!" cried the girl from the window. "My new man slapped his face."

The men turned and stared at the disconsolate figure. One of them yelled—

"Kick him into the river!"

This sentiment would have found favor had not Mrs. Jinks appeared in the doorway with a dish of fried pork, fried eggs and cold cornbread. She announced:

"You menfolks stand clear. This poor meechin' critter's goin' to eat suthin'. Then he's goin' to mosey along right smart. Libbie, you keep shet."

"I won't! I'm my own woman!" angrily defied the girl.

Bell quieted her. Then he called out to the men:

"Keep your hands off that sheep. He's my meat. Ten dollars to the man who brings me a jug of whisky, which you boys will help me drink."

A jug was quickly produced, and the men went inside. Graham ate his supper. The western sun was sliced in half by the timbered horizon. Loud laughter came through the empty windows, as the jug was passed. A shrill whistle back of the house stilled the merrymaking. The men came through the doorway, ready to run and hide. Bell answered the whistle and explained:

"It's only the man who came ahead of me—the one I sent for. He signals to make sure I'm here. Nothing to stop our fun."

Soon voices were heard behind the house, and the Jinks girl cried—

"They're comin' through the corn."

Then the man who had preceded Bell to the Landing, accompanied by the messenger sent to bring him back, came around the south end of the house. The gambler called out—

"Everything all right?"

"All right, Jim," replied the man.

Bell ran down the veranda steps and walked aside with the man. They conferred briefly, and Bell received a paper and thrust it into a side pocket. In a voice, audible to all, he directed:

"That ends your part. You can take the skiff and drop downstream or go inland."

"Keen to be going. Going now. In the skiff. So long. Good luck."

"I've had all the luck," said Bell, and he laughed contentedly as he turned and stared at Graham.

Mrs. Jinks came along the veranda and hurriedly whispered to Graham:

"Dig out through the corn. I'll pick you up at the fence 'n' put you into the Hickman path. Mr. Bell will heap mis'ry on you to make the menfolks laff."

"Perhaps he won't bother me any more. Here's some money."

"Be you a plumb fool? I'm scared of him. He'll take Libbie away, an' then send her back!"

"Enough. Leave me. Perhaps he won't take your girl away."

"Oh, Lawd! He's comin' to bedevil you! After he's done, the men'll pitch in!"

She scuttled back to the doorway and into the house, so that she might not witness the cruel sport.

The skiff had vanished around a wooded bend, when Bell halted before the motley group and said—

"Citizens of Lasker's Landing, I will now put my trained sheep through his tricks and then we'll finish the jug."

He walked toward Graham, with the people following. Halting, he grinned sardonically and told the spectators—

"To prove this sheep is very tame, I will first slap his face." His voice was venomous with hatred, as he lowered it almost to a whisper. "It makes me see red every time I think of the bluff you ran on me, every time I think of giving you credit for what you never had—guts. I want you to return to the river. I want to meet you in St. Louis and show you up, so the niggers will crowd you into the road. Why, damn you!" His rage smothered him, and he struck Graham violently in the face.

Like a steel spring suddenly released, Graham was clear of the veranda and had driven his fist against the snarling lips. Astounded by this show of resentment, Bell hesitated for a moment, then he pulled his knife and with a scream leaped forward. Graham had his knife out, too. In the first clash each gripped the knife hand of the other.

They whirled and worked down the slope toward the water. As they came together, with clinched hands outstretched, Bell butted his head into Graham's face. He tried the maneuver a second time and released the strain on Graham's right wrist for an instant, long enough for Graham to drive his knife down to prick Bell's left thigh. The wound was nothing, but the sharp bite of the steel startled Bell. He swung wildly about. Then he threw himself backward, risking all on the chance of tearing his right hand free to use his blade.

Over and over they rolled, and into the muddy water. Bell managed to free his hand, but lost his knife and tried to draw his gun. Graham lifted his shoulders, threw himself forward and forced his foe's head under water. In his spasmodic efforts to turn his adversary, Bell lost his grip on the knife hand. Instantly the heavy blade rose and fell twice.

"WHAT have you to report, Lieutenant Graham?" bruskly greeted General Curtis, as the young officer was admitted to the provost marshal's private office.

"The masquerade was a complete success, sir," said Graham, as he placed a thin, sealed package of papers on the table. "These have had a bath in the Mississippi, sir; but I'm confident you'll find they explain how the proposed maneuvers against New Madrid and Columbus are to mask General Grant's and Commander Foote's campaign against Forts Henry and Donelson."

Curtis tore open the package and after a brief examination grimly admitted:

"The writer of this is very well informed. But what's to stop this man Bell from telling the enemy the contents of these papers?"

"He died, sir, before he had a chance to tell anything. Once I learned he had sent those papers across to the Tennessee shore to avoid the risk of having them found in his possession, I knew he must die. The challenge, the poker game, the prearranged arrival of the guard, our unobstructed flight—they permitted me to keep up with Bell and be with him, when he overtook the man he had sent on ahead to Lasker's Landing. It was a fair fight between us, although I was prepared to resort to any means."

"You have done well, Lieutenant. I confess your scheme seemed a bit fantastic when first submitted. You must have played your part excellently. You will now report back to your company for active duty. I see your face is bruised. You suffered no serious hurt?"

"One serious hurt, sir. I had my face slapped when I could not resent it."

THE HAND IS QUICKER

Smoky Smith and the perfect crime

By Barry Scobee

IT OCCURRED suddenly to "Smoky" Smith, pondering on the hotel porch and watching the village square with his sultry eyes for D. Sylvester Moreland, not to attempt a "perfect crime" after all.

He had read in his time a hundred stories of the so-called perfect crime and how the criminal invariably slipped up on some unforeseen trifle, left some clue in spite of every human precaution—such as reversed writing on the blotting pad, a fingerprint on the bathroom soap, a lost pearl button, a broadcasting parrot, a laundry mark, cigar ash, a wife, a knife and, in these latter days, even microscopic scratches on bullets.

"Nix on't," thought Smoky with Shakespearean brevity.

Smoky distrusted his ability versus science. It gave him the "willies" to think of sitting around after the killing, waiting for the trifle to turn up. And in this moment of swift pondering he definitely dismissed the idea of a finely planned murder, though with sincere regret. At once his mind felt empty, forlorn. But perhaps because nature abhors a vacuum, there came glimmering and shimmering into his thought like lightning through a window, a great new idea for the annihilation of the man who stood in his way.

It was sheer inspiration. For the idea was no more nor less than to commit the crime boldly in the open and fight it out afterward with the law. In other words—and it came to him neatly pat—avoid punishment rather than evade detection. Hire two or three of the best lawyers, thought Smoky, and let them utilize the safeguards the law gives the criminal — habeas corpus, delays by dilatory pleas, continuances in the trial court, appeals to higher courts. Smoky had seen them all brought to bear; and accessory to these, there would be absent or forgetful witnesses, a jury in a hurry to go home, a friend on the jury to block a verdict, an indifferent public, possibly a prosecuting attorney hiding behind the claim that the people would not stand by him, an election within eighteen months and perhaps a new prosecutor, with ultimate acquittal or dismissal of the charges.

Smoky chuckled grimly. Numerous Americans, wishing to slay somebody, may have thought of the same thing, but it was new to Smoky. It was the great idea of his lifetime. And besides all these aids there would be the sob-sisters pulling for him, and sentimental old ladies, flappers and admiring sheiks.

At this moment he saw D. Sylvester Moreland leaving the pretty little brick-and-stone office at one side of the square.

Moreland called himself a broker. He traded in anything that would not soil his manicured nails or his clothes. It was his daily custom to walk to his bachelor apartment in the big house on the hill. Bent in that direction now, he stepped into the street to cross to the small park that filled the center of the square, striding importantly and swinging his stick.

A question born of his great inspiration got itself into Smoky's mind—

"Why not now?"

He did not argue the point. He simply scanned his surroundings to see whether there was anything to interfere with his proceeding.

It was the supper hour. Few people were in sight. A clerk leaned in the drugstore door. Across the square Mrs. Carhart was locking the library for the day. Behind him in the shabby hotel Mrs. Seeley would be calling supper in a moment. On the hotel porch, waiting for the meal, were two other boarders—a fellow called Ted, a painter and paperhanger who had blown into town for the spring clean-up; and Ernie Freidecker, a big, slow citizen with thick fingers, who made tombstones under a shed beside a tiny brick office two or three blocks from the square, and who was listening indifferently to some windy yarn of Ted's.

Circumstances were highly satisfactory. Smoky arose, stepped from the porch and started for the park to intercept his enemy.

Moreland entered the park under the maple-trees, strutting in his new spring suit. He stopped at a flower bed to pluck a scarlet tulip—in violation of a village ordinance; but, as most of the people in town would have said, what did D. Sylvester care for a mere ordinance? He tucked it into his lapel with a fastidious pat.

Smoky thought with a certain pleasurable satisfaction that *his* buttonhole posy was a thirty-eight automatic slung handily under his left arm.

Smoky Smith was the village gambler, but a gambler with an ambition to grow. He had prospered, and in the last year or two he had been striving to enter the business underworld—from professionalism to commercialism, as one might say. He had more than once borrowed money from D. Sylvester, and repaid it with usury. The broker had invariably demanded a bigger "divvy" than Smoky thought fair, until Smoky had come to hate D. Sylvester for his greed, his power, his natty clothes and the manner that enabled the man to pass Smoky on the street at times and never be aware of his existence.

But it was more than injured superiority complex that was biting Smoky now. It was a pinched purse—the hardest pinch yet. Smoky had a cargo of narcotics hid away that would make him a handsome profit, really put him in the capitalist, or broker, class when he could dispose of it. Every dollar that Smoky had been able to rake and scrape was invested in the goods. He had even taken off his diamond stickpin and borrowed money on it from D. Sylvester. With the result that D. Sylvester had Smoky on the hip.

For a week, while Smoky sat on the hotel porch and pondered murder, the broker had had two or three men shadowing Smoky, so that the merchandise could not be disposed of in the clear. Smoky was tied up, blocked and desperate. Any time now these hired eyes of Moreland might stumble on the hiding place of the drugs, which would mean that Smoky would have to begin at the bottom of the financial ladder again.

D. Sylvester was coming on toward the center of the park, swinging his stick. As if to hail him, a squirrel ran down a maple-tree head foremost and sat up in the middle of the brick sidewalk, no doubt with the picture of a peanut in his brain. Moreland did not like the park squirrels—nor cats, nor dogs. He slashed viciously at the little fellow with his stick, and strutted on scarcely aware of his act.

Then the two men were facing each other—D. Sylvester Moreland, best dresser in the village, political boss in a local minor way, and supposedly the richest man; and Smoky Smith, a tin-horn with ambitions. D. Sylvester stared in the offensive way he had.

"Well?" he demanded. And then, "You shouldn't accost me this way in public so much. Some gossip will get on to your racket."

"Your racket," retorted Smoky, "with your hired thugs watching me from upstairs windows, and across the square and maybe eating at the table with me, for all I know."

Smoky's voice trailed out. A second great idea was scratching at the door—He should, he was telling himself, make his act look like self-defense.

"Well?" Moreland repeated impatiently, and added, "What if I have got some friends watching you? You need watching, way you're refusing to pay me fair returns for my assistance the last year or two."

Smoky spoke softly, solicitously.

"Y'got a little green bug on your collar," he said. "You better take your hanky."

Moreland was surprised, but wonderingly he swung his right hand back to his hip pocket. In some ways he was a dub.

Fifty seconds later Smoky was at the telephone in the shabby little hotel.

"Give me the sheriff, quick!" he commanded, his thick, short figure almost stretching on tiptoe to reach the mouthpiece.

And to the sheriff he said, with a sudden hoarseness:

"This is Smoky Smith. I've shot Dee Moreland. Come and get me. Huh? Yup, at the hotel."

He hung up and waited a moment; then called Locke of the law firm of Locke and Lowery in the adjacent little city of forty thousand.

"Lissen, Mr. Locke," he began when he had that individual on long distance. "This is Smith of Ferndale—yeah, Ferndale—jiggle your phone—yeah, Smith, Smoky Smith. Say, I've shot D. Sylvester Moreland and I want you and Mr. Lowery to defend me. What? Sure I got money. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Sure, come right away. I don't wanna go to jail. I got business tonight, highly important. G'by."

When he stepped back from the telephone the agitated Mrs. Seeley put a worried question at him.

"What about your two rooms and a bath, Mr. Smith?"

"I'll keep 'em," snapped Smoky in his usual brusk manner toward her. "Why not?"

He went to the door and looked. Several people had gathered in the center of the park and others were losing no time. Smoky wondered how the news had spread so swiftly. Then Sheriff Monday rattled up before the porch in a little car, and Smoky knew that he was formally in the hands of the law—of officers, lawyers, newspapers and the Great American Attitude. He almost sighed with relief, and stepped outside, proffering his pistol.

"This what you done it with?" asked Monday in pursuance of duty and curiosity.

Smoky nodded.

"What did you do it for?"

Smoky had his answer ready.

"Self-defense."

"What? Did Dee draw on ye?"

"He put his hand back to his hip pocket."

"No! Well, regardless o' that I guess I'll have to take ye along."

"Sure."

"Hop in," Monday invited with sympathetic foresight, holding the car door open. "I'll spirit you away before the public can embarrass you with their stares."

"Thanks," said Smoky. "You're a man of understanding and I'll remember it."

"Well," drawled Monday, getting the car under way, "Dee Syl didn't help me get elected, ner neither did you, so I'm playing no favor-ites. Just extendin' the usual courtesies of the office."

They drove swiftly to the corner of the square to little red brick court-house with the gambrel roof. In his office the sheriff took from his pocket a bunch of business-like keys.

"Hey," protested Smoky, "whatcha getting them out for? I ain't going to be locked up."

"Y'ain't?" said Monday bulgingly.

"Accused has got rights, ain't he?" retorted Smoky.

"Sure," agreed the sheriff. "What's yours?"

"My lawyers are coming. Locke and Lowery. They gonna get a habeas corpus for me."

"Umm—guess they will all right, them birds. No use to lock you up then, but I ought to be gettin' over to the scene. Umm—"

Steps sounded in the corridor and Mrs. Monday entered the office—a dumpy, red-haired woman known locally as a conversationalist.

"I been over to the scene," she announced, giving Smoky a hard stare.

"You stay here and watch him," directed the sheriff. "His lawyers are coming. I got to get over to the scene myself. Don't talk too much."

Monday clumped out; and even as the door slammed Mrs. Monday was putting her introductory question.

"It was you that shot him, was it?"

"Yup," said Smoky ungraciously.

"What for?"

"Self-defense."

"Oh? What did he do?"

"Put his hand back to his hip pocket."

"Oh! And then you binged him. I'd never heard he carried a gun on him. Who's your lawyers?"

"Locke and Lowery."

"Those crooks? They'll get you out of it, don't you worry. Maybe I oughtn't call them crooks, but you know what people say. Gee, you'll have to pay 'em a pile, won't you? Gee, little old Ferndale will get in the headlines now! Free advertising. And you too. Your picture maybe."

Smoky sat down in the sheriff's swivel chair and turned his back. He wished to think.

"Killings are getting to be the style," Mrs. Monday went on. "If you had to kill somebody I'm glad it was Dee Moreland. I always thought he was a crook. Foreclosed mortgages right and left. He could meet you on the street one day and bow like the Prince of Wales to Queen Marie, and meet you the next day and never know you was in sight—especially if he was with a society high-stepper."

Smoky lighted a cigaret with fingers that trembled only slightly from his recent experience.

"Why did he put his hand back to his gun pocket?" pursued the lady. "I mean, why did he have it in for you?"

This time Smoky was almost startled. How could he answer that? If he told that D. Sylvester had reached to his hip pocket he would have to assign some reason for the act. What story should he tell to explain it? He shook his head resignedly. He didn't know. Let the lawyers figure it out. That's what he was hiring them for, to do his thinking. He smoked and listened absently to Mrs. Monday. Presently a rumbling voice in the corridor announced the return of the sheriff. That officer and a deputy and the prosecuting attorney entered the room.

"Hello, Smoky," said the prosecutor coldly.

"Hello, Jimmy," returned Smoky.

"Looks like the law's got you on the hip at last, eh, Smoky?"

"Me?"

"I wouldn't be meaning Mr. Moreland, would I?" sneered the prosecutor.

"What I mean, Jimmie, is I done it in self-defense."

"What for?"

"He put his hand back to his hip pocket."

"And didn't have a gun on him," said Jimmie triumphantly. "We frisked the body."

"He didn't!" Smoky could have been floored with a straw, judging by his looks.

"You know he didn't," retorted Jimmie, who had been elected partly by Moreland's influence. "Mr. Moreland never carried a gun. Everybody knows that."

"What did he put his hand back to his hip for then?"

"You answer that. What was the trouble between you? Or was there any? What's your version of why he would reach for a gun?"

"I don't want to talk till I see my lawyers," said Smoky.

"I'll bet you don't. I'm going to file a first degree murder charge against you, if that's the straightest talking you can do. The jail-house for yours."

"Nix, now, Jimmie. Don't get too speedy. My lawyers 'll be here right away now. Locke and Lowery."

"Habeas Locke and Corpus Lowery. They'll try to get you committed to bail. In the meantime—"

Jimmie picked up the telephone and called the clerk of the court and a justice of the peace. The clerk was there in a pair of minutes, and issued a warrant on Jimmie's complaint, which was served formally on Smoky, thus making everything technical so that *that* couldn't bob up to stare the prosecuting attorney in the face later on. Jimmie also filed his formal information, with its numerous to wits and saids, charging murder in the first degree.

By this time a dignified and clean old justice of the peace had arrived, as well as a gang of men and boys, and they all climbed the stairs to the justice's cubbyhole on the second floor for a hearing to commit Smoky to jail. The justice wrote slowly in a big book for some time, listened to a statement by the prosecutor, and at Jimmie's request ordered Smoky to jail.

"Without bail," he added, slamming the book shut.

"Hey," protested Smoky, "ain'tcha getting kinda previous?"

The old man eyed Smoky for a moment, taking in the heavy features and the careless insolence behind the query, then he rose up on his dignity like a colonel in war.

"What do you mean, sir?" he cried out in an old man's voice. "How dare you address the court in that loose and disrespectful manner? Where's your respect for the law? You are known as a common gambler. You lend no hand to the support of the statutes. You are charged with an outrageous crime. And yet you act in the manner of a man free and favored. Do such as you no longer stand in awe of God or law?"

"Eh?" Smoky's round, heavy face was puckered in puzzlement.

"Take him away!" shouted the justice. "Get him out of my sight."

The crowd clomped out. On the stairway Smoky broke out indignantly.

"Fine way for him to talk to a man! Who does he think he is?"

"Y'oughta poked him on the beak, Smoky," put in one of Smoky's friends.

More goggle-eyed citizens had gathered in the little hall below. Crowding through them came the attorneys Locke and Lowery with their searching glances—Locke tall and lean and sardonically humorous; Lowery cast in a thicker mold as to face and waist, with a soothing, peacemaker's look about him. Smoky introduced himself, and while they shook hands the lawyers took his measure—russet shoes, checked suit, soft shirt and bow tie and a bluestone fedora tilted jauntily on one side of his head. Then the experienced men of the law turned to the prosecuting attorney with questioning expressions.

"Whatta you done, Jimmie?" asked Locke.

Jimmie told them succinctly: First degree, committed without bail. The legal glances shifted to the sheriff.

"Where can we go for a private seance with our prospective client?" inquired Lowery suavely.

"Right in my office," Monday directed. "Deppity can stay here in the hall. I'll go to supper."

Smoky and the attorneys went immediately into the office and closed the door. Monday and his wife left by the back way. Some of the crowd lingered, some left. Jimmie knew he had a fight on his hands, largely a lone-handed fight, for he had no deputy to confer with and precious few friends whose advice was valuable.

If he could thwart this pair of high-gear lawyers it would be a plume in his chapeau. He wished to think. He strolled alone into the quiet residential district.

IN SHERIFF MONDAY'S office Locke and Lowery and Smoky Smith faced each other, and Smoky beat them to what he thought was coming.

"How much you gents figgering to stick me for?" he asked with a truculent thrust of his heavy chin.

"Now—now," began Lowery soothingly. "We'll let that adjust itself."

"Nothing doing," Smoky growled. "How much?"

"It will be a god's plenty," declared Locke, the rougher, who believed in bending the twig while it was young.

"A thousand berries, maybe," suggested Smoky, knowing the value of starting low.

"We don't take charity cases," retorted Locke. "If that's your bid you better let some of the local boys handle your case."

"And get hung!"

"Well, we're not in the bush league."

Smoky sat down; likewise Lowery. But the lean and sardonic Locke kept to his feet, pacing restlessly.

"How much did you two light on between yourselves as you drove over?" pursued Smoky.

"How much have you?" asked Locke, who won confidence by his cynical lack of hypocrisy.

"Here—here," interposed Lowery the peacemaker. "Let's find out what it is all about first."

"Good idea," conceded Locke. "Tell us about the killing, Smith. Give us the exact facts."

Smoky had no intention of doing so. Exact facts! Tip them off to the twenty thousand dollars' worth of poppy dreams he had hid out and let them wring him dry? Not Smoky. But he had no definite yarn in mind, so he began to stumble along.

"Well, yuh see, it was this away. I'm waitin' for supper, see, and I think I'll take a sashay through the park to stretch my legs. And I meet Dee and he says he's going to wipe me out, see? He puts his hand back to his hip pocket and I bing him. Then I go and phone you."

"Why did Dee Moreland," inquired Locke, "want to wipe you out? What was the reason he intended to shoot you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Holy cow! Moreland told you just out of the blue, I suppose, that he was going to do for you!"

"That's it, just outa the blue sky."

"Little gods of Shanghai!"

Locke jammed his hands into his coat pockets and strode back and forth. He kicked a chair. He muttered. Suddenly he stopped in front of Smoky.

"You expect to go to trial with a bedtime story like that?" he cried. "Is that the best you could think of to tell us?"

Smoky looked down his nose wondering how much more he dared to reveal.

"You're doomed, you're doomed!" shrilled Locke. "We wash our hands of you. We don't want anything to do with a corpse dangling at the end of a rope!"

Smoky paled a little but he managed a cynical laugh.

"Nix on the ballyhoo," he said. "You don't have to scare me into a fat fee. I'm white, adult and foxy. I know what I've done. I'll pay."

"You bet you'll pay!" shouted Locke, really angry now. "You're too fresh for an egg. You'll shell out. I'll say you will! You'll write a check for four thousand ducats right now or we'll walk out of here and leave you to common lawyers."

"Nix again," sang Smoky. "And if you've heard this one before stop me: I couldn't write a check for four hundred right now."

Locke looked at Lowery and Lowery looked at Locke.

"Let's go home and get some sleep," said Locke quietly, and Lowery nodded and got up from his chair.

Smoky bounded to his feet.

"Nix, nix," he pleaded. "You got to keep me outa jail, see? You got to get me a writ tonight."

"Why?" asked Locke coldly.

Why indeed! Smoky mopped his low and sturdy forehead with a red-and-green bordered hanky, and experienced a swift vision of why. Vultures and ghouls were

probably waiting out there in the corridor this minute to make sure that he was jailed so that they could go digging around for the stuff where he had it hid. Moreland's snoopers would just be waiting for the chance. One night in jail and Smoky's twenty thousand bucks would be no more. Fresh drops of perspiration squeezed out of Smoky's pores.

"Listen," said Smoky humbly, "you guys gotta keep me out of jail tonight. I got business to look after."

"What business?"

"I don't wanta tell you that. But you get me out on a writ tonight and tomorrow forenoon I'll write you a check."

"For four thousand dollars?"

"Yes," agreed Smoky hoarsely.

"You'-re ab-so-lute-ly certain you can do it and we can cash it?" pressed Locke.

"*Ab!*" Smoky assured emphatically.

"Then write it now!"

They fumbled over the sheriff's littered desk and found a pad of checks and a pen, and Smoky wrote the order for four thousand dollars, dating it the next day. As Locke blew on it to dry the ink he returned to the matter of the defense.

"Now," said he, "let's get down to brass tacks. What did Moreland want to wipe you out for? What had happened between you? What dealings had you had, if any—eh?"

Smoky decided that he dared to tell about the last little deal, so he said that over a week before he had borrowed six hundred dollars on his diamond stickpin from Dee Moreland.

"Ah," said Locke thoughtfully, halting in the pacing that he had resumed. "Ah. Had he asked you to repay him?"

"Every day," declared Smoky.

"Ah! Well now, it would be a pretty good defense if you could go on the stand and swear that he hounded you, and threatened you."

Locke stopped before Smoky and looked down at him hard and significantly. And Smoky's little black eyes glittered with understanding, for he realized that his case was being framed for him. The attorney went on, boring at Smoky.

"A pretty good defense, Smoky, if you could go on the stand and swear that Moreland, after he had made the loan and taken the diamond for security, had got fearful that he would not be repaid—uh, say, because the diamond was not worth quite six hundred—"

"Which was a fact," put in Smoky.

"Fine! Everybody knows Moreland was as tight as paint on a house, his only extravagance being dress. If you could swear that he was angry at being bested on the loan, and hounded you and began to threaten, and at last plainly said he would shoot you if you did not refund at once, and you did not have the cash to do so—"

"All of which," declared Smoky, rising gallantly and intelligently to the bait, "I can swear to easy. Yessir, easy."

"Fine!" crowed Locke. "Now to keep you out of jail. About this reaching to his pocket—who saw Moreland do that?"

Smoky named the people he thought had been witnesses, mentioning Ted the paperhanger and Ernie Freidecker.

"If you'll find 'em," Locke said to Lowery, "and see what they can swear to."

"They're out in the hall," said Smoky. "I can hear Ted telling 'em all about it."

Locke went to the door and inquired, and the two men came in. Yup, Ted breezed for himself and Freidecker, they could swear that Moreland reached to his hip pocket and then Smoky shot. Yessiree, they had set right there on the hotel porch and seen it all.

"Great stuff," Locke assured. "Smoky, you'll be out in a jiffy."

The lawyer took up the telephone and asked for the residence of the district judge, and in a moment began to speak affably.

"Good evening, Henry! Yes. Yes, Locke. Oh, fine, thank you. And you? That's good. What's this I hear about you going to run for the supreme bench at the next election? Well—well! If I can do anything in our Bar Association to speed your candidacy I'll certainly do it, Henry. You bet. Oh, no favor at all.

More than glad to boost. But speaking of favors, Henry, I have one to ask of you right now. Could you come to the court-house and hold a little hearing? We want to try for a writ to get our man Smoky Smith out on bail. Eh? Yes, it was no doubt a startling tragedy to the village. You'll be right up? Fine!"

The news of the hearing to be held got around and by the time the officials were in the old courtroom ready for action, quite a little crowd had gathered in the seats. Locke and Lowery put up the paperhanger and tombstone maker, who swore that they had seen Moreland make a gesture to his hip pocket. Jimmie tried to counter this with the village marshal and the undertaker to the effect that no gun had been found on Moreland's person. But in rendering his decision in favor of Locke and Lowery, which required twenty minutes of careful explanation to the assembled audience for politics' sake, the judge held that the applicant for the writ of habeas corpus could not have known of the absence of a gun in said Moreland's pocket and that the reaching to the hip, under the American tradition, did in fact constitute an excuse for self-defense that, in his opinion, entitled the applicant to bail; and he, the court, therefore, would set the bail in a reasonable sum, to wit, seven thousand dollars.

While the judge talked, Smoky wrote on the back of an envelope the names of several friends he saw in the room, and when the judge descended to his chambers Lowery took the list and called the men aside. Presently five of them—a pool-hall man, a tailor, a bootlegger, a restaurant proprietor and one of Smoky's gambling friends—had filed into the clerk's office and signed on the dotted line, committing themselves to the sum of seven thousand dollars bail. After which Smoky strolled from the court-house without restraint, accompanied by all his friends and many others.

Smoky was eager to be about his business of the night. Now would be a good time to give the snoopers the slip, he thought. They would surely be in this crowd. So when they came to the hotel he waved to the gang jovially and said he'd be back in a minute.

Smoky entered the hotel and ascended the stairs in plain sight. He went straight through the upper hallway and descended the rear stairs. He ran to the garage on tiptoe and pushed his fleet roadster out noiselessly. With a flashlight he went into Mrs. Seeley's wood and coal shed and dug out lumpy burlap sacks from under Mrs. Seeley's sacked coal. Smoky had spent most of his nights recently watching from his upstairs window to see that nobody else did this same thing. With the stuff loaded in the back of his car he stepped on the starter—just as a car came into the alley.

Smoky's car was the swifter in the brief race that followed. Three miles out of town he was drawing rapidly ahead. The pursuer fired two shots. Smoky retorted with a rusty old revolver he kept in the machine. And for the rest of a seventy-mile drive he was unmolested.

The purchaser of his cargo was ready with the cash, had been waiting a week. He suspiciously examined the little square packages and Smoky suspiciously examined the bills that he received. But all was O.K. and satisfactory and the deal was consummated.

LONG before daybreak Smoky was back in his two rooms and bath at Mrs. Seeley's. And by the middle of the forenoon he was up, shaved, dressed and ready for business. But as he started out he bethought himself of something. He returned and looked at an object hanging in his clothes closet beside a top-hat. Smoky had regarded this object longingly many times in the last year or two but had never had the courage to go on the street with it.

It was a gentleman's stick of blackthorn with a crook at one end to hang over his arm.

This time Smoky grimly seized the ornament and strode out with it. By the time he reached the street he was master

of himself. D. Sylvester had carried one; why not he? Any town needed a fancy dresser; a gent, in other words. Smoky swung along nonchalantly to his java and stack of "hots."

As Smoky cooled his coffee in the saucer he looked over the papers. He was in the headlines wide and high. He rather enjoyed the sensation, until he stumbled on a statement from Jimmie to the effect that the prosecutor was going to demand that the case be tried at the June term, which was just the next month.

"Aw," said Locke to Smoky scornfully, later in the day. "Don't let that worry you. We won't go to trial for a year or two. Trust Lowery and me for that and you do your share here. Be humble. Go to church now and then. Wear your hat straight on your head. Lay a moral background. It impresses a lot of possible jurors. Be kind to kids and dogs. Wear a flower in your lapel. A white one's best. And prosper. Above all things prosper. A rich man is never hung, and if he goes to the pen he's pardoned."

So daily Smoky stopped in the little town park and plucked a flower for his buttonhole, preferably a white one as an emblem of innocence. His affairs flowed smoothly. Luck fell his way. For one thing it began to be whispered about that D. Sylvester had been ruining himself in the stock-market, and when his estate went to probate there was plenty of proof that the broker had been worse than hard up.

"Great stuff!" exclaimed Locke to Smoky. "He was desperate for money, ready to do anything to get it. It proves your story that he was after you with a gun to get his six hundred spinners back. If our luck holds, your case will never be called. Shake hands with yourself that you have a lawyer like me."

The first scuffle in court over the case came late in May when the judge and lawyers were conferring over the assignments for the June term. Jimmie insisted that the State versus Smith take first place on the docket, at which Messrs Locke and Lowery went up into the air.

"Go to trial in less than two months after the killing!" shrieked Locke. "Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"Your Honor," soothed the soothing Lowery, "to go to trial at this time would be the gravest injustice to our client. We have not had time as yet to prepare his case. We are—"

"All right," said his honor, "let the matter come up at the September term."

But at the September term, with Jimmie demanding that the case be tried before the witnesses failed in youth and memory and passed on to their final reward, Locke still howled.

"Your Honor," he protested, "we can't go to trial now. One of our witnesses is missing—Ted the paperhanger. He's our star witness."

"Continued," said the judge. "I suggest you issue a subpoena and have your witness here for the December term. Hold him under bond if necessary."

A few days later Locke found Ted in the next village, where he had been all the time, and had a subpoena served on him.

Smoky patted himself on the back frequently in the next three months. His great scheme of avoiding punishment rather than evading detection apparently was flowing on to success. He was buying nicely in the liquor trade and was acquiring a good list of customers, and had a reliable bootlegger to make his deliveries. Luck was certainly falling his way.

The case was assigned for trial, without much argument, late in November. Court opened the second Monday in December, and the courtroom was packed with an expectant and happy audience. His Honor congratulated the women on their good looks, said he imagined their cooking was just as fine, sympathized with men who must do jury service at this holiday season of the year and raised a few laughs at Jimmie's expense, he and the prosecutor belonging to different political parties and the judge despising Jimmie anyhow.

His Honor was called a great vote getter.

After this bit of jollying he got down to

business. Were the parties ready? Locke and Lowery were, cockily so. The State?

"Just a moment, if it please your Honor," said Jimmie approaching the high bench with a document in hand. "I ask leave to make minor corrections and amendments in the information."

"What are they?" demanded the judge impatiently.

"I have set out in the information that Mr. Moreland was murdered on April third when in fact it was May third. I state that five shots were fired. There were four. And I use the name 'Smoky' Smith when the actual name is Throckmartin Smith."

"When did you discover your blunders?" roared the court, not resisting this opportunity to romp on Jimmie.

"Since I entered this room, sir."

Jimmie was a very young man who had been boosted into office by the other lawyers wishing to give him his start in the profession by way of the prosecuting attorney's job, where most of them had got their start.

"It was this way, your Honor," Jimmie forged ahead. "I prepared this information a few minutes after the murder—"

"We object to his continued use of the word murder," put in Locke.

"Sustained!" rasped the court.

The spectators sniggered. Jimmie became a bit rattled.

"It was May third," he began again, "but April was the preceding month this year and it had just ended. What was more natural than for me to make that minor error in my hurry?"

"I don't know," snarled the court. "You tell us."

The crowd laughed openly.

"As to the shots, your Honor," Jimmie kept on, "I thought there were five until later, and I meant to change that. As to the name, Smoky he has been called that ever since I came here to live. I ask leave to make these changes in accordance with the practises of any court in the land."

"Wa-a-a-ait a minute, hold your hosses there, young man," interposed Locke. I've got a word to say."

He stood before the bench and fixed the judge with a hard stare for full ten seconds, then spoke with a peculiar emphasis.

"Your Honor—we object."

A flush tinted his Honor's cheeks. He may have wondered whether he were being told what to do. Also the thought of Locke's influence might have been in the remote background of his mind. He looked at Jimmie with gathering anger—Jimmie who was to blame for the judge's having to decide for or against the trial right now.

"We," said Lowery suavely, "will consent to a continuance."

"Consent!" roared Jimmie. "It's what you want! It's dilatory tactics. Your Honor, they knew all the time they would ask for a continuance today. They'll postpone this trial for the next ten years."

"Your Honor," said Locke in the pause, "we object to going to trial now and we ask you to sustain us."

"Sustained!" snapped the court, very red in the face, and began to rail at Jimmie. "You ought to be recalled! Don't you pay any attention to your cases before they come to trial? What have you been doing all summer? I don't know how the people happened to elect you but I'll bet my hat they don't do it again."

"Yes, sir," murmured Jimmie.

"You be ready for trial at the March term, understand!"

Jimmie's retort showed that he had a certain courage and impudence.

"How about the other side?" he asked. "Does your Honor mean them too?"

And two more minutes of blazing wrath was poured out upon his head.

THE MARCH term when it rolled around was easily disposed of. Smoky was in Florida, cruising for his health. He sent back a physician's certificate to prove it, and to show that he was in no condition to be present. The court threatened to issue a bench warrant and have him brought in for trial, or to order the bondsmen to pay. But he didn't.

Smoky returned home in April with some natty new togs and a satisfied smile.

He went to the office of Locke and Lowery, his blackthorn stick hooked over his arm, a white blossom in his buttonhole, his hat on one side of his head and jingling dollars in his trousers pocket.

"You're looking prosperous," said the lawyers. "Florida's great, hey?"

"Most valuable trip for my health I ever took on the advice of my attorneys," smirked Smoky.

"Watch your step," growled Locke. "We didn't tell you to go away. What have you been doing under the palmettos?"

Smoky grinned and tossed up a dollar and caught it. But he did not say that he had organized a hijacking party and deprived an importer named Demoslotti of a cargo of wet goods, nor that Demoslotti was a he-man, a man full of red corpuscles, with a penchant for vengeance. Nor did Smoky mention that he had fled from Florida and Demoslotti as an act of safety first, though as a much richer man.

"How's our little problem in avoiding punishment?" he asked gaily. "When's the case come on? Wish you gents would get through with it. I want to expand my business, but this thing hangin' over my head cramps my style. This blinkin' bail-bond keeps me too close to mama's apron strings."

"That's gratitude for you!" cried Locke, "After we've sweat blood to keep you from being tried! Listen here, my bold bucko, I doubt you'd come clear if you went to trial."

"What!" bawled Smoky. "After I've paid you four thousand bucks?"

"We've run up against a harder snag than we expected," declared Locke. "That Jimmie boy really means to hang you."

"What's eatin' him, a conscience? Aw, he gives me a pain in the neck!"

"You may get a real pain in that part of your anatomy," retorted Locke. "You never can tell what a fool jury will do."

"What does Jimmie want—some salve?" demanded Smoky truculently.

"Not he. Jimmie's young and idealistic yet and he really thinks he ought to convict you. I've talked to him and can tell the signs. But he'll grow, he'll grow."

"Buy him off!" commanded Smoky. "Get something on him. Tie his hands."

"If the case doesn't come to issue in June," spoke up Lowery, "it will be certain to in September. Election is coming on in November. Our friend Henry, the court, will make politics out of us."

"What's *he* want?" growled Smoky. "A little salve?"

"Only to be elected to the upper bench," said Lowery sadly.

Smoky pondered in moody sulkiness. Was his great scheme of not to evade detection but to avoid punishment to fail? His collar seemed like something very tight and cold, and he ran a finger inside and around, making a wry face. Then suddenly he brightened.

"Ah," he exhaled. "A light shines! Have I been applying salve to the wrong wheels? How about you gents—do you need some whang?"

"Two thousand dollars would carry us nicely past the June hazard," said Locke.

THE CASE, however, did not come to issue in the moon of crop cultivation. There was no scene about it. The judge simply let it be known that he would not call a venire for the term and take the busy farmer from his field.

It was well that the matter went this way, for Smoky was away again for his health. Demoslotti, the hijacked Florida importer, with a couple of uncouth looking companions, had arrived in town and inquired for Smoky. But Smoky saw them first and jumped so far for personal safety that he did not get back until long after June had slid into history and Demoslotti had departed.

Before Smoky made his jump for safety he considered the advisability of getting the drop on Demoslotti and putting him out of the way—before Demoslotti should do for him. It was easy to consider bumping a man off, now that he had turned the trick once. But he decided against it, at this time, for fear that another slain man

on his hands might prejudice the public and the jury against him in the Moreland case—should Jimmie ever actually get it to trial.

Jimmie, through the long, hot Summer days, mulled the case and wished that he had a deputy to talk it over with for weak points and strong points. Sometimes he told himself that it was a case of cold-blooded murder. At other times, in his low spells, he didn't care what it was. He was playing a lone and lonesome hand.

It was the accepted belief among the few who troubled to think about it that with the election coming on the judge would no longer be lenient with excuses for delay and, acting on this hunch, Jimmie tuned himself up for the trial in September. His judgment was sound, for with an indignant talk about long drawn out cases the court set the issue at the head of the docket, and it duly came on for trial on the second Monday in September.

Two days and a half were spent impaneling a jury. Smoky sat with his attorneys, whispering advice as to individuals. The judge from the first entertained the audience by admonishing the lawyers that they must hurry if they intended to get through in time for the circus that was to be in town on Friday. And Locke did his part in keeping the time from hanging heavy on the crowd's hands by joking with the veniremen and taking digs at Jimmie with his keen, swift wit that few men could parry. His humor was that of a sardonic clown, in no sense slapstick but witty and hard. People said it was as good as vaudeville to hear Habeas Locke rough the witnesses and haze the other attorneys.

The taking of evidence was begun Wednesday afternoon, and by this time the stage was fully set. In one section of the room was gathered a knot of Smoky's friends—men and women, who made it a point to laugh admiringly at Locke's sallies and snicker jeeringly at Jimmie's statements—such instances as when Jimmie told the jury earnestly that he meant to show by his evidence that Smoky Smith was a cold-blooded murderer. This so amused Smoky's rooters that Sheriff Monday had to rap for order.

Jimmie opened with Ted and Freidecker to lay his foundation, for he as well as the defense had subpoenaed them. Jimmie brought out that they had witnessed the shooting of Moreland, along with other basic facts, but the crowd's zest lay in anticipation of Locke's cross-examination of the two men. And the people perked up when the shrewd, dark-faced lawyer took them over.

"You make tombstones, Ernie?" Locke inquired with friendly familiarity.

"Yes, sir, I do," answered the slow and kindly man.

"Make good ones?"

"Well, I hope so."

"Be willing to use one of them yourself, would you?"

Tittering ran through the audience, with Jimmie objecting to the query and the court nodding for Locke to go on.

"To get down to brass nails, Ernie," Locke continued, "did you see Mr. Moreland reach back to his hip pocket as if for a pistol or revolver?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's all at this time. I'll go into this in more detail when you come up as a defense witness."

"Just a minute, Ernie," said Jimmie as the witness started to leave the chair. "Did you see a gun in Mr. Moreland's possession?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see the slain man's pockets searched shortly after he was killed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see a gun then?"

"No, sir."

"That's all."

After this, in due time, Ted came up for Locke's attention and the attorney began in the same vein.

"You hang wallpaper, don't you, Ted?" he inquired.

"Yezzir."

"Were you ever hanged yourself?"

"Nozzir, not yet," Ted grinned.

Laughter among the spectators.

"A telling point for your client!" interjected Jimmie.

"Now, Ted," Locke went on blandly, "did you see Mr. Moreland reach to his hip pocket as if for a gun?"

"You bet!"

"That's all."

"Did you," asked Jimmie, "see a gun in Mr. Moreland's possession?"

"Nozzir."

Jimmie, as the trial progressed, introduced a deposition by Mrs. Carhart, who had witnessed Smoky's little affair from the side of the park opposite to Ted and Freidecker. She had gone to Europe on a vacation after three continuances of the case. Her sworn statement made the important point that Smoky reached for his gun, not after Moreland, but simultaneously with the movement of Moreland's hand to the rear. She had observed the tragedy closely because her interest had been aroused by a curious stiffness of posture, or gait, in Smoky as he drew near Moreland. Locke declined to combat the admission of the document as evidence, dismissing it with an easy gesture.

"Merely the after-thoughts of a fine but high-strung woman," he said.

"A calm and sensible woman—" began Jimmie, to be checked by the judge observing to the audience with a humorous, beaming twinkle:

"Our good friend Mr. Locke is saving time. Do you suppose he is thinking about the circus Friday?"

His Honor was awarded by happy simpering through the crowd.

Thursday, the second day of evidence-taking saw an even more crowded courtroom bent on enjoying Locke's humor. The presence on the stand of the village undertaker and the constable as Jimmie's witnesses afforded the sardonic, clownish lawyer a splendid opportunity to make further telling points for his client.

"So," he began drawlingly in his cross-examination of the undertaker, his tone weighted with implications, "you reached the body within one minute after the shots were fired?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man in his habitually hushed voice. "Not more than a minute."

"Not more than a minute. Had any other undertaker beaten you to it?"

The usual spurt of laughter, with Smoky's group of rooters exploding with pent-up mirth. Jimmie shouted objections but Locke bawled him down, for Locke could drown any lawyer in the State with his volume, and most judges. Locke grinned when the constable fell to his mercies, and the officer hardened in sullen defiance before the attorney said a word.

"You have sworn," observed Locke, standing before his victim, "that you arrived where the body lay not later than fifteen minutes after the shots were fired. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then tell us this: How did you manage to get there so soon?"

More laughter, with the constable lowering at the lawyer.

Jimmie drove home to the jury with these two witnesses that no pistol or revolver had been found on Moreland's body.

When Jimmie finished for the State and Locke and Lowery began to run their witnesses through the hopper, Smoky leaned back in his chair, clasped his hairy fingers behind his head and settled down with a feeling of relief. The thing was about finished. Jimmie had succeeded in doing but little. Pretty soon Smoky's perfect crime would be perfected and his faith in the Great American Attitude justified.

"Seventeen months since I done it," he thought with satisfaction, "and I ain't been in jail yet. And only insulted once."

He had in mind the old justice of the peace who had lectured him that first night.

In the late afternoon of Thursday, Smoky, to testify in his own behalf, ascended the witness chair with all the assurance warranted by confidence in his attorneys and his contempt for the youth and inexperience of the State's attorney.

Jimmie scarcely voiced an objection through Locke's examination of the defendant, but sat half hunched down in his chair with an idea growing hot within him

—something in the nature of an inspiration that can come to even young prosecuting attorneys. And when at last Smoky was turned over to him for the cross-questioning, Jimmie rose to his feet with a feeling of power that he had not felt before during the trial. He began his attack at what he considered the weakest point, with a definite idea in mind for the finish.

"Smith," he said, and his manner was earnest to severity, "why did you shoot Moreland?"

"In self-defense," answered Smoky glibly.

"Did you know that Moreland was unarmed when you shot him?"

"No."

"You thought he was armed?"

"Sure Mike."

"Why did you think that?"

"He put his hand back to his hip pocket."

"Smith," Jimmie demanded, "do you mean to say, and do you expect a jury of sensible men to believe, that your only knowledge or supposition that Moreland carried a gun is based on the single fact that he reached to his hip pocket?"

"What?" asked Smoky blankly, fencing for time. "Gimme that some more."

"I say," Jimmie went on, "Mr. Moreland might have been reaching for his handkerchief, or a plug of tobacco, or his purse. Do you expect to sit there and tell a jury of men endowed with common sense that you believed a man had a gun just because he reached to his hip pocket, believed it strongly enough to draw your gun and shoot him down?"

"Oh, we object to all that, your Honor," broke in Locke. "It's irrelevant. It doesn't make any difference what the witness believes the jury will believe. He must tell the truth and let the chips fall where they will."

"Keep within the proper bounds of inquiry," the court directed Jimmie.

"Very well," said the prosecutor, and turned back to the witness. "Smith," said he, "why did you think Moreland had a gun? Tell the truth!"

"Just told about it a minute ago," said Smoky. "You see, I got six hundred simoleons from Dee on this stickpin I got here in my shirt bosom. And he got nervous about it and wanted me to pay him back right off'n the bat. I told him I couldn't. Told him I was flatter'n a boardin' house biscuit. I didn't have the cush. And he stampeded. Said he was desperate for money. Got goofy-eyed about it. Said if I didn't pay him quick he'd plug me, see? Shoot me down like a dawg."

"Who else heard him say that?"

"Well—"

"Don't try to fence," said Jimmie. "Nobody heard him, Smith. You haven't produced a single witness to swear to any such conversation. Do you expect the jury to take your unsupported—"

"Now, your Honor," broke in Locke again, "we object to all that. He's not inquiring properly. We have shown by a dozen circumstances that Moreland was desperate for money. Desperate enough to threaten the defendant's life."

"I have a definite object in view, your Honor," said Jimmie.

"Go ahead then," the court consented, "but confine yourself to facts, not what the witness might think or imagine."

"Smith," said Jimmie, and he strode up close to the chair with something in his manner that brought a hush of expectancy to the courtroom, "Smith, is it possible that you never at any time saw a gun of some sort in Moreland's possession to justify shooting him down in his tracks?"

Smoky squirmed and flung a look of startled appeal to his lawyers, but before the act was complete, in the fraction of a second, Locke and Lowery were on their feet, with Locke bawling at the top of his voice.

"We object! We object! No ground has been laid for such inquiry. This is a gross violation of the rules of evidence. This upstart of a prosecutor is trying to get something before the jury by trickery!"

"As if you never tried it!" retorted

Jimmie, and the crowd snickered—the first laugh at Locke's expense.

"Your Honor," Jimmie addressed the court, "I am pursuing a legitimate line of inquiry. I am trying to show the jury that the accused shot the victim under the flimsiest of excuses, without ever in his life having seen Moreland with a gun. I am within my rights."

"Go on a little more," said the judge. "Let's see."

Jimmie turned on the witness like Vengeance herself, arm outflung and finger pointing. The courtroom caught its breath. And Smoky suddenly looked dumb and confused and yellow, as if he thought the judgment of a righteous God were about to descend upon him.

"Smith," thundered the prosecutor, "Smith, did you ever see a gun in Moreland's possession to justify your suspicion on that fatal day, to excuse your vile and murderous act?"

Locke, his sardonic face writhing with fury, his one arm outflung, was for an instant in a position of bending toward the judge with some shout of protest forming in his throat. But before the shout could be launched Smoky opened his stiff lips to let one word slide out.

"Yes."

Locke's vehemence toward the bench subsided. He turned about slowly, scanning first his client with a hard, veiled look, and then Jimmie. That "yes" was more than Jimmie had bargained for. He had intended to wring from Smoky a confession that he had never at any time seen Moreland armed, then to hammer and hammer at the jury with that fact. But here was a new element of unknown potentialities, as great a surprise to him as it must have been to Locke and Lowery. In lieu of anything better to do in the emergency, he grinned at Locke, and Locke rose neatly to the situation. He eased down, thrust his hands casually into his pockets and spoke with just the right touch of surprise and concern.

"Well," he said, "our client never told us anything like that. If it is a fact that he had seen Moreland with a gun we certainly wish to establish that as a high point in our defense. With your permission, Friend Prosecutor, I'll take the witness back for further direct examination."

"Go to it!" said Jimmie.

Cautiously and reluctantly Locke approached the hot handle of the situation, but now that beans had been spilled he knew that he had to go through with it. And Smoky, having stumbled, knew that he had to make that "yes" good, so to Locke's queries he answered that he had seen an automatic pistol on Moreland's desk the day before the shooting. Yes sir, and Moreland had brandished it too.

Jimmie called to the stand in rebuttal the administrator of the Moreland estate along with an assistant who had checked over Moreland's possessions at the office and the apartment, and these men swore that they had not found any firearm of any sort; swore convincingly.

It was a victorious moment for Jimmie, an inwardly hilarious moment. For he felt that the jury could not but see that Smoky had lied, could not do anything but convict. And this ended the trial except for the arguments before the jury. The court directed that these be postponed until the following morning, adding with a merry twinkle—

"If you legal lights aren't too garrulous we may get off in time for the circus parade at eleven o'clock."

The crowd tittered at this keen humor and went home.

If Jimmie was elated, Smoky was cast down by his testimony about the gun. Locke was sore to the core and he hazed Smoky mercilessly, until he saw that his client was losing his nerve and getting sulky at the same time, when, his wrath wearing down, he became reassuring.

"Keep a stiff upper lip," the lawyer admonished. "You never can tell what a jury will do. The chances are it will be hung. That will mean another trial, if Jimmie doesn't get tired of it and throw up the sponge. Means we could get a few more continuances, delay a year or two more. In the meantime the witnesses may

forget or go to the Happy Hunting Grounds. If the verdict is unfavorable we have recourse to many legal twists including a new trial and appeal to the higher courts. So you just go and rest easy, get a good night's sleep. Remember for a nightcap that Locke and Lowery haven't lost a case in four years."

This comforted Smoky so that he was able to get a perfect night's sleep and enter court the next morning in his usual natty appearance—creased trousers, russet oxfords, hair brushed down close to his head in neat whorls, a white flower in his lapel, and his diamond pin sparkling like a headlight. He had not carried a pistol to court lest he prejudice people. The jury was already in the box when he made his snappy entrance, and he nodded and smiled affably to the twelve men—glancing out of the corner of his eye to see whether the two or three newspaper men from the adjacent city were looking.

It was straight up nine o'clock, with the circus very obviously in town, when court convened for the finish. The village was raucous with squawkers and strangers hawking toy balloons. The circus was being moved from the railway to the show grounds along a street two blocks from the court-house, and the jury by craning a little could catch glimpses of the wagons.

The judge, with his appealing twinkle to the crowd and a significant gesture toward the noises outside, asked the lawyers how garrulous they expected to be. Not very garrulous, they replied. Jimmie opened the arguments. As he talked, getting warmed up, he saw that some of the jurors were intent on gazing through the window to where the circus wagons were passing. He raised his voice, hoping to draw them back, but only two or three took the hint. Two or three were still absorbed beyond hearing. Finally Jimmie stopped short in his address.

"No use for me to talk," he said, "unless the jury will condescend to listen."

All but one man jerked to guilty attention.

"Hi, there!" shouted Jimmie to him. "What's the clown doing now?"

It brought the man around, and seeing himself the focus of all eyes and grins, he flushed angrily and leaning forward yelled at Jimmie at the top of his voice:

"Don't try to be cute! You can't carry it off like Mr. Locke!"

Suppressed chuckling in the court-room. Even the judge passed his hand over his mouth. When the flurry subsided Jimmie kept on, but it was with a feeling that he had lost ground, a feeling almost of futility.

In an effort to regain lost prestige, Jimmie talked longer than he meant to, so that a restlessness began in the room. Locke observed these bored movements in the jury as well as in the audience, and one of those uncanny bits of tactics that he was always springing and succeeding with came to mind. It was worded and ready when Jimmie sat down and he arose to address the twelve good men and true.

"Men," he said with simple, confidential directness, "you're weary of sitting in those chairs. I'm not going to bore you with a long-winded talk. I'm going to put my case on the lap of your good common sense. I just want you men to get this—that Moreland *was* in desperate need for money, that Smoky Smith had six hundred dollars borrowed from him, and that Moreland *did* put his hand back to his hip pocket as if for a gun. That's all. If your sound common sense tells you there is a reasonable doubt in behalf of my client, find him not guilty."

There was a stir of surprise as Locke sat down. Wasn't he going to answer Jimmie's long arraignment of Smoky and his criminal record—Smoky's being arrested for drunkenness, and speeding, his indictment by the grand jury on a liquor charge, his being mixed up with a killing in a pool-hall? Apparently not, since he had taken his seat and Lowery made no sign of rising.

Jimmie saw the significance of the ruse as soon as Locke had begun, and he decided likewise to curry the favor of the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said as he stepped

before them for the closing, "I'll be as good a sport as my opponent. All I ask you to remember is this—that Smoky never gave a sensible man's reason for killing Moreland, that Moreland did not have a gun on him and that Smoky lied about seeing a gun in Moreland's office. And I'm gambler enough to tell you to do one of two things, go the whole hog or none—give me a verdict of first degree murder or turn Smoky loose. He's either as guilty as hell or as innocent as that white flower in his button-hole!"

The trial was finished. The judge recessed while he and his stenographer retired to chambers to finish the final instructions to the jury. The spectators began to buzz with talk of the circus. The jury craned and joked.

It was half-past ten when the judge returned. His instructions were brief. He read them swiftly, and sent the twelve men away into the dark little jury room. As they filed in one or two cast reluctant glances back through the window to the circus grounds, where the big top and gay flags could be seen in the sunshine.

With the jury out for an indefinite period, some of the crowd left the room. Smoky walked about behind the railing kicking his legs to remove the kinks, and nodded and grinned to friends.

"Hey, Smoky," a young man called to him guardedly, "going to get out in time for the circus parade?"

"They'll wait for me," grinned Smoky. "You go tell 'em I said to."

Smoky's group of friends laughed delightedly at this wit.

Smoky kept walking about. He cracked a joke with the clerk of the court, who had Smoky's automatic pistol on the desk in front of him, marked "Exhibit A". A thought flitted through Smoky's mind that he would use that same pistol to do for Demoslotti.

Smoky said inconsequential things in a loud voice to Lowery. Locke was off by a window smoking a cigar and talking in low tones to the reporters. Smoky strutted a bit to show how cool he was. He pulled out a plug of tobacco, bit off a chew and masticated it heartily.

In a surprisingly short time a rattle at the jury room door-knob brought the waiting people to attention. The bailiff unlocked the door and the jury filed out.

Smoky sat down abruptly. He took out a fancy yellow and purple bordered handkerchief and mopped at his face.

Two or three of the jurors had sheepish grins, as of a joke lingering from the jury-room, or as if half ashamed of their verdict, or of their haste in arriving at it. When they had resumed their seats juror Number Five arose and said that he had been elected foreman, and he held a form paper toward the clerk.

"Here's the dope," he said.

While the clerk tiptoed across for the paper and back again, there came above the tense stillness of the court-room the music of a band, and farther back in the distance the tooting of a calliope. No doubt about it, the circus parade was on the move. The clerk ducked his head and read the verdict, mumbling.

"We the jury—blah-blah-blah—Not Guilty."

Not guilty! A great greedy feeling of gladness swept Smoky—Free! Free! The perfect crime perfected at last! He was hazily aware of banging seats, a rush of feet for the exit, of people shaking hands with him, the judge discharging the jury, discharging Smoky himself from custody.

The jury went hurrying out with the crowd, but one of the jurors lingered, with a doleful countenance, and plucked at Jimmie's sleeve and drew him aside.

"How on earth," Jimmie demanded, "could you fellows return a verdict like that?"

"Well," said the man, "I was for you, Jimmie, ever since the trial started. First degree. Some was for manslaughter. But in there"—he stuck a thumb toward the jury-room—"they laughed and said how did we get so hard-boiled. And they laughed about getting out in time for the circus parade and said anyhow Moreland did put his hand back to his hip-pocket and how was Smoky to know? And then we voted to clear him."

"But you could have hung the jury."

"Yeah, and stay a couple days? I couldn't waste the time, Jimmie. I got a tomato crop about to spoil on the ground."

Smoky, in the clearing court-room, heard the last part of this talk, and laughed. His perfect crime put over!

As he stood about waiting for his attorneys, who were busy with the clerk over some cost details, his eye fell on his pistol lying on the clerk's desk and he was reminded of something.

He could go back to Florida and get Demoslotti before Demoslotti got him!

Impatient with the arguing lawyers and clerk, he suddenly decided to go out and see the parade pass. With a grin he strode into the corridor. As he passed the door of the justice of the peace who had offended him that first night he spat tobacco juice on the panels and leered.

Outside the court-house, he saw a row of backs along the sidewalk, heads all turned to watch the approaching calliope. He strode to the walk and joined the onlookers. Some one tapped him on the shoulder. Thinking it one of his crowd he spat exuberantly out of the side of his mouth and looked around.

It was Demoslotti.

In some ways Smoky was a dub. The two stood regarding each other for an instant. And then as if hypnotized by fear, or some recollection, Smoky moved his hand back toward his hip-pocket, and Demoslotti reached inside his coat.

And this time it was Smoky who was unarmed.

A Raid on the American Coast

By LEONARD H. NASON

THE town of Nauset on Cape Cod has the distinction of being the only American town that was visited by hostile forces during the World War.

In the summer of 1918 a German submarine appeared off Nauset, and cruised there for some time. She was evidently hunting for a French cable that goes ashore at Orleans, but was unable to find it. Though she was seen several times by fishermen and watchers along the coast, they had no idea she was a German, and hence no alarm was given. There was considerable coastwise shipping passing up and down, but the hostile vessel paid it no attention.

Later in the day, however, having been unable to grapple the cable, the submarine's commander decided to try his luck at some of the shipping. There was nothing in sight now but a tug with a tow of three barges—poor game enough for a warship of the Imperial German Navy! The submarine came to the surface, shelled the tug, shelled and sank the barges, and shelled the summer cottages at Nauset. The coast guard and all the local fishermen went out in motorboats to rescue the barge crews.

One of the barges had turned straight up and down, her stern sticking up out of the water. Watchers on the shore discovered that there was a dog perched on the top of the submerged cabin. They also discovered the periscope of the submarine sticking up now and then like the dorsal fin of a shark.

Nevertheless a man named Walter, known among his friends as Good Walter, shoved off in a motorboat and went out to the barge, where he got the dog and brought him safely ashore.

The alarm had meanwhile been sent up and down the coast, and sub-chasers and destroyers began to gather, but they were too late and the submarine in all probability got safely back to Germany, where beyond doubt her commander was decorated for his successful raid on the American coast.

A mystery of a South Pacific army cantonment

THE BLUE CORD

By Thomas C. Copperidge

VERY few Americans have ever heard of Sibutu, a flat little island that lies almost in the shadow of Borneo. Yet the United States paid more per square acre for this little speck of territory than for any other of its foreign possessions.

Just why Company M, Infantry Volunteers, was sent to garrison Sibutu was never made clear, but probably it was because of the fact that one of the European powers was trying to get possession of the little island with a view to using it as a buffer between the Philippines and British North Borneo.

At any rate, Company M, having served through the Spanish war in accordance with the term of its enlistment and having served six months overtime in the Philippine insurrection, was taken from a homeward-bound transport that lay in Manila Bay and was dispatched to Sibutu with a promise that regular troops would shortly relieve them—a promise that was not kept for some time.

Whether somebody in Manila had forgotten Company M, or whether there was no organization free to replace it, mattered little to Private Slim Gube a tall, lanky Tennesseean who sat at the mess-table grumbling at the long-winged insects and moaning for his mountain home in the Cumberlands.

"Sibutu is the worst island in the Philippines," Gube complained to Black Bill Powers. "No," he corrected himself before Powers could speak, " 'tain't the Philippines, either. It's the tail of the Sulus. No self-respectin' Filipino would ever be found way down here." He paused to bite off the end of a sour pickle which he held between thumb and forefinger and grimaced at the sharp taste, showing his fine, white teeth.

"This blasted island wouldn't make three good-sized farms," he continued, "and here we fellows are, sort of homesteadin' the shrub-covered sand spit. We ought to of been home six months before we even started down here." Slim pushed a thick lock of black hair back from his forehead and slapped irritably at a mosquito hovering near his cheek.

"Mm-hm," drawled Powers lazily. "But we're here and we can't get away

until a transport comes, so what's the use of growling?"

"Can't get away, huh?" snorted Slim. "Watch my smoke. You just see if I can't get away."

"I suppose," Powers chaffed, "you're going to sail back to the Cumberland in that boat you dug out of the sand."

"I ain't committin' myself, but at that, it wouldn't be much of a trick to make the forty miles over to Borneo, and there's lots of steamers sailing from Sandaken to America."

"Going to take Mahoney with you?" Bill inquired.

"If I don't take him, the malaria will," returned Slim gloomily. "Just like it's takin' some of the other fellows. May get me, but I guess it won't."

"Why are you buying all the commissaries?" Bruer, the company clerk, wanted to know. "Don't need a cartload of canned goods to last you to Sandaken."

"When a man goes to sea he can't have too much grub," Slim informed him. "Might get held up by a storm—you never can tell." He pushed his plate to the center of the table, stretched his long arms and rose.

"Want to play a little game of blackjack?" invited Powers.

"Nope," Gube said. "Got to work on my boat. Besides, I'll need all my money."

"Better keep out of that dugout, Slim," Powers warned the other. "The mast is too high and she's got too much sail. You near tipped over yesterday. I was watchin' you."

"There's plenty of outriggers. She wouldn't sink if she did turn over," Gube threw over his shoulder as he walked away.

He spent the next two hours sewing and fussing with his boat-sail which he had assembled from scrapes of old tents. When he had completed his task, he turned to three large wooden boxes beside him. He calked them around the joints and made them secure.

"There!" he muttered with satisfaction, driving his last nail. "Them seams won't leak now, I reckon." He looked up and saw standing in front of him Black Bill Powers.

"I'll be hanged!" Powers exclaimed. "If I hadn't of known you all my life. I'd think you'd gone plumb crazy. What you going to do with them boxes?"

"Goin' to put my chow supplies in 'em," Gube replied calmly. "Got to have water-tight grub boxes in an open boat."

"Grub, your cross-eyed uncle!" Powers snorted. "Have some sense about yourself. Let's have a game of blackjack."

"Ain't got time. I got to cut some wood, Bill."

"Huh!" Powers grumbled. "You've been hanging around that wood pile close as a bear to a bee tree. There's about twenty cords there, and I'll gamble you've handled every stick of it in the last week. It ain't your job to chop wood, anyway."

"No, it ain't my work," Gube agreed, "but I got to do somethin' to keep from goin' crazy. I'll have to be gettin' out of here pretty soon."

The crunching of footsteps on the gravelled beach attracted the two men.

"Hello, fellers," Rat Joe Cardwell sang out genially as he approached within hailing distance.

"Hello yourself, Rat," returned Bill.

"Thinking of leaving us, Slim?" Cardwell inquired, watching Gube curiously with his small, close-set gray eyes.

"You listen to me, Cardwell," Slim retorted sharply. "There's two kinds of rats. One carries tales and the other carries germs. I ain't never 'sociated with either sort. Now if you'll move on—" Slim hesitated suggestively.

"Sorry." Cardwell's thin sallow face flushed. "Didn't know anything private was going on."

"There wasn't, but there's gonna be in about two seconds." Gube's fists closed.

"Well, I'll be going, Slim. You seem all out of sorts." Cardwell laughed forcedly and sauntered off down the beach.

"You'll talk yourself into trouble, Slim," Powers declared when Cardwell was out of hearing.

"I know Rat heard me say I'd be gettin' out of here soon. He'll go and tell the captain tomorrow mornin' when he's cleanin' up the Ol' Man's tent. Rat just dog-robs for the captain so's he can carry tales. But what else could you expect of a man that's been over here fourteen months and ain't never burned no powder in his gunbarr'l!"

"Always been bad blood between you and Rat," Bill remarked. "You better leave him alone. You'll get in trouble if you quarrel with him." With this parting advice, he left Gube to finish his work.

At supper, Slim was silent and moody, and after he had bolted his food, he retired to his tent at once.

WHEN the roll was called the next morning, Slim Gube did not answer to his name.

"Private Gube!" repeated the first sergeant, raising his voice. Still receiving no response, he finished calling the names of the rest of the company and reported Gube "absent."

"That's strange," the captain commented. He towered over the first sergeant, biting his stubby gray mustache.

"Yes, sir," agreed the sergeant. "It's the first time Gube has missed a call. Maybe he's down with malaria."

"That's about it," the captain sighed. "Dismiss the company and find out if Gube is ill."

The sergeant entered Slim's tent and came out a moment later with the startling report that some time during the night Gube had mysteriously disappeared, taking with him his entire equipment.

"Gone!" repeated the captain sharply. "Why, where could the man go? I put Mahoney in the same tent with Gube. Doesn't he know anything about the time this fellow left? Bring Mahoney to me and I'll have a talk with him."

"Mahoney is sick in quarters, sir. He just told me Gube was in bed last night when tattoo sounded and seemed to be all right, except he was possibly a little moody."

"You mean to tell me," the captain demanded, his florid face growing redder, "that Mahoney was sleeping by Gube's side and didn't even know when he left the tent?"

"Mahoney is very sick, sir," the sergeant answered.

"I know where Slim Gube's gone," put in Rat Cardwell, who had edged close to the non-com and the captain. There was malicious satisfaction oozing from every pore, and his claw-like hands clenched and unclenched nervously. Hisses and boos sounded among the groups of men who still loitered within earshot.

"What did you say, Cardwell?" asked the captain, disregarding the sounds.

"Why, yesterday Gube, he—he—" Cardwell stammered. His face grew red and he stopped.

"R-a-t, R-a-t!" some one spelled out menacingly.

Cardwell glanced from the corners of his eyes at the knots of men. From their furtive glares he perceived he had brought the wrath of the company upon his own head. He opened his lips to speak, but no words came.

The captain now realizing the meaning of the hisses, stiffened and turned toward his soldiers, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him in many tight places—soldiers who up to this moment had not only shown every respect for their commander, but love as well. Now they stood with sullen, averted faces.

Captain Basford knew he must act instantly if he wished to control the situation. Looking with narrowed eyes from one man to another, he said sternly—

"Let me hear somebody hiss or howl again!"

There was complete silence. The men began to melt away, and in a few moments Captain Basford, his first sergeant and Cardwell were all that remained in the company street.

The captain's lips were white.

"Now go on, Cardwell," he commanded. "Finish telling me what you know about Gube."

Cardwell repeated the conversation he

had overheard between Gube and Powers the day before on the beach and the remark Bruer had made about Slim's buying a large quantity of canned goods from the commissary. In conclusion, he declared that Gube had told nearly every man in the company that he was going to desert if the relief boat did not come soon.

"That settles it!" the captain exclaimed. "Cardwell, fetch me my field glasses." He turned to the first sergeant. "What do you think, Sergeant? Do you suppose that fool has tried to desert?"

"The evidence points that way, sir," answered the sergeant. "There was a heavy southwest wind last night. If Gube put out in that, he's most likely at the bottom of the sea by now."

"No doubt he is," agreed Captain Basford, taking the field-glasses Cardwell handed to him. "And to think all the men have known about this and not one of them even cheeped!"

The company was camped on the extreme northern end of Sibutu at the highest point on the island, less than twenty feet above sea level. From the camp street, the captain swept the horizon through his glasses. There was not a sail or any floating thing in sight on the deep blue of the water.

"Sergeant," he said finally, "there is a chance that Gube started out last night and was blown back to the island. He may be hiding somewhere around the beach until it is dark enough to make another trial."

"It is very likely, sir. Let us hope it is nothing worse."

"We'll make a general search of the island. Assemble all the men available immediately after breakfast," the captain directed as he made for his own quarters.

When the company was formed at seven o'clock, Private Cardwell failed to appear. Investigation disclosed that he was not in his tent, and no one remembered seeing him at breakfast. While inquiries were being made, however, Cardwell came walking rapidly into camp, looking like a satisfied cat. He carried a crumpled campaign hat in one hand.

"I expect Gube's done for," he announced, approaching the captain.

"Why do you expect that, Cardwell?" Captain Basford demanded.

"I found his boat wrecked on the west beach, half way down the island, where it had been left by the tide. And here is his hat; it's got his name inside." Rat handed the headgear to his commander.

It was a tense moment. Every man in the company, save one, loved Gube as a hero in battle and an all-around good fellow in camp. After a minute's silence, the captain commenced to pace back and forth.

"Men," he said gravely, "this is a very unhappy affair. There is nothing we can do except to search for the body of your comrade. Dismiss!"

Doctor Harrison had come along as the captain finished speaking. He was a trim little man with sandy whiskers, and his blue eyes twinkled good-naturedly under his campaign hat, which he wore at a jaunty tilt.

"What's happened, Captain Basford?" he asked.

The captain did not reply at once, but when the company had broken ranks, some departing to change to other clothing, while others proceeded directly to the beach, he related briefly to the doctor the details of Gube's strange disappearance. Doctor Harrison thoughtfully stroked his whiskers with a freckled hand. At last he looked up at the tall captain.

"I've been thinking about that hat you're holding. It seems to me the cord is rather dry to have been in the water. It's too tight for the hat, too."

The captain carefully pinched the blue cord. He could feel no moisture in it. The felt of the hat itself was soggy, and a slight squeeze brought from it drops of water.

"That's rather odd," he said, frowning.

"It's extremely odd," the doctor declared. "I'd like to see that boat."

The two officers turned toward the beach, and when they reached the scene of the wreck they found Powers and

Cardwell there before them. The two men were pulling a distorted sail out of the water.

"Cardwell," the captain said abruptly, "tell us just how you found things here when you first came this morning."

"Why," Rat began, narrowing his little eyes, "why, the boat was here where it is now, only it was upside down. Some of the boys turned it over. The hat—" he checked himself to think. "Oh, yes. It was half buried in that heap of seaweed. No, let me see. It was in this drift over here." He pointed to a pile of sticks and sea-grass a few feet away.

"And the cord—was that on the hat when you found it?"

"No, sir. It was further up on the beach, lyin' by itself. I guess the wind blew it up there."

Bill Powers dropped the piece of sail he was tugging. His forehead corrugated.

"That cord, sir," he said slowly, pointing to the twisted object in the captain's hand, "that cord is one of the old issue. It ain't adjustable. It won't go on Slim's hat. Not one of that make will."

"It's Gube's cord," Cardwell asserted positively. "I know, because part of the tassel is torn off. I recollect seeing him wear that very cord."

"There's something crooked about it all," Powers declared thoughtfully.

"What do you think is crooked, Powers?" asked the captain.

"Couldn't say exactly, sir. Just kind of got a hunch, I reckon."

The captain smoothed the wrinkles out of the hat he held. Three times he attempted to force the blue cord down around the crown, and three times he failed.

"Seems to me Powers is right," the doctor remarked, watching the experiment closely.

"The hat has swelled from the water," insisted Rat.

"That will do, Cardwell," said the captain. "You and Powers join the searching party."

Powers hesitated.

"I think," he said slowly, "the captain should know that Slim carried about five hundred dollars in his pocket."

The two officers exchanged significant glances. Following at some distance behind Powers and Rat, Doctor Harrison made comment to his companion.

"This matter appears to be growing complicated. It will require some careful investigation, I fancy."

"Have you any pertinent suggestions?"

"Suppose we stroll over and have a talk with old Tamboola, the chief down in the village. He and Gube were rather thick. We might pick up something useful from him."

Tamboola came out to meet Captain Basford and the Doctor. He was short and very fat, but he had an air of pride and great dignity. He greeted the officers courteously and expressed regret at the mysterious disappearance of Private Gube, of which he had been told by some of the members of the searching party.

Tamboola was a pearl fisherman, and for years he had disposed of his finds in British Borneo, where he had learned to speak fair English. Since the American occupation of Sibutu he had confined his activities mainly to making coconut beer for the soldiers. Gube had been one of his best customers.

After some questioning, the old chief admitted that about eleven o'clock the night before he had been out to look for one of his boats which had broken from its moorings and drifted half a mile or so seaward. He and his men, towing the craft to shore, had seen a soldier on the beach near the place where Gube's boat had been found wrecked. Tamboola had had but a glimpse of the white man, but he was sure the man he saw was a head shorter than Gube.

"Think back, Chief," urged the doctor. "Does it occur to you that the man you saw on the beach was acting in a suspicious manner?"

"Americans are all ver' strange to me. I was not sorprize' to see them et any place et any time." Tamboola shrugged his shoulders.

The answer sounded evasive to the

doctor, but he believed further questioning would be useless and he remarked to the captain that he thought sick-call would sound by the time he could reach camp.

Halfway back, the doctor, who was leading the way along a foot-path, stopped short and turned to face Captain Basford.

"Private Gube has either met with foul play, as the newspapers say, or is hiding somewhere on this island. That much is certain."

"Have you any new ideas about the affair?" inquired the captain, mopping the perspiration from his face with his handkerchief.

"I don't want to accuse any one until I know something definite, but just the same I'm suspicious of a certain man."

"And that man is Cardwell," the captain stated rather than asked. "I know, of course, that the Gube and Cardwell families have been enemies for generations, but Joe is a weakling. He couldn't do any one bodily harm even if he wanted to."

"I want to think this over," the doctor replied over his shoulder as he stalked along the trail again.

Doctor Harrison was not the only person in camp who entertained suspicions. Bill Powers took into his confidence a number of Gube's closest friends, and together they combed every nook and cranny on the island where a body could possibly be hidden. They even borrowed boats from Tamboola and carefully dredged the shallow water on the western side of the island where the battered boat had been discovered. Three days of diligent search proved fruitless, and at last the men gave up the discouraging task.

On the fourth morning after Gube's strange disappearance, Cardwell entered his commanding officer's tent earlier than usual. The captain was sitting at his field desk, going over some reports, and paid no attention to him. Joe went about his work very slowly. When he had made up the bunk and carried out some waste paper, he began to polish a pair of tan shoes which he had shined to perfection only the day before.

Caressingly, he rubbed the shoes with a woolen cloth and, gazing at his work with close attention, he remarked—

"I know something the captain should hear about."

The captain had been watching Cardwell from the corners of his keen blue eyes. Now, he turned on his camp stool to face Joe directly, and without speaking, he waited for his striker to continue.

"It's about some of the men," Cardwell went on. "Last night after taps I went down to the kitchen to get a cool drink, and while I was standing there by the water-barrel, I saw a light in that old shack down by the beach. Thinking it might possibly be Gube in there, I crawled along to the hut." He stopped and rubbed the tan shoe carefully.

"Well, go on. What did you see?" The captain spoke sharply.

"I peeked through an opening in the thatch wall and I saw a lot of fellows in there. Some of them was pretty drunk. Bill Powers was one of them, but he didn't seem to be drinking much."

"Coconut beer!" the captain exclaimed, slapping his thigh. "Coconut beer! That's what's making the men sick, not malaria!"

"Pardon me, but not at all, sir. They had two jugs of whisky. I could smell it. There was some heavy gambling going on, too. Mahoney lost about two hundred dollars. It's sort of strange, sir. Mahoney was broke just before he took sick, and I couldn't help thinking—well, the captain may remember Powers saying Gube was carrying five hundred dollars around when he disappeared, and him and Mahoney having the same tent and all, sir, I just thought—"

There was a faint tap on the tent, and Doctor Harrison entered.

"Good morning, Captain Basford," he greeted. "Anything new on our big mystery?"

Cardwell put down the shoe he had been polishing and left the tent well satisfied with himself.

The captain pushed forward a stool.

"Sit down, Doctor. Yes, there is something new."

"Wait a moment," Harrison requested. He fumbled in his pocket, found a fat cigar and lighted it.

"There," he said, puffing contentedly, "now go on. Give us the medicine, Captain."

Captain Basford repeated what Cardwell had just told him, and when he had finished the doctor chuckled.

"Sam Hill! Whisky, eh? And I thought it was my quinine that was doing the good work! Ten men asked this morning to be marked off sick report. They must be getting the stuff from Tamboola. He gets it from Sandaken, I suppose. Wish I had a dram of it. I'm feeling malarial myself."

The captain smiled.

"I won't bother about the whisky if it's not brought into camp, but whisky is not the point. How did Mahoney happen to lose two hundred dollars when he was broke a week ago."

Doctor Harrison smoked a while in silence.

"Mahoney," he finally said, "is a wandering Irishman from Philadelphia, the only man in the company we don't know, yet he seems to be a straight-forward fellow. He and Gube are bosom friends—or were, I mean."

Captain Basford tapped his desk with a pencil. Before he could reply to the doctor, his first sergeant appeared at the entrance to the tent and saluted.

"Good news, sir," he announced as he entered. "Ten men off the sick list this morning." He placed the morning's report on the captain's desk to be signed.

The two officers took the sergeant into their confidence and told him all that Cardwell had said about Mahoney losing heavily in a card game the night before. The sergeant, in turn, admitted that Mahoney had borrowed small sums of money from him quite recently, but he professed absolute faith in the Irishman and added his opinion that if Mahoney seemed to be suspiciously "flush" suddenly, it was somehow all right. He agreed, however, to keep a close watch on the man's actions.

Three more days passed. The gambling in the shack continued each night and the whisky supply was undiminished.

ONE MORNING about a week after Gube's disappearance, the sergeant reported to Captain Basford that he had seen Cardwell suspiciously prowling in Mahoney's tent the night before, during the latter's absence.

"Bring Cardwell here immediately," ordered the captin.

When Joe appeared before his commander, his face was flushed and he seemed excited.

"I'm a little late this morning, sir. I got something new about Mahoney."

"And I have something new about Mahoney, too," said the captain curtly. "What were you doing snooping around Mahoney's tent last night while he was out?"

Cardwell moved uneasily.

"Uh—why—that's what I was just going to tell you." He fished a hat cord from his pocket.

"Where did you get that?" demanded the officer.

"I picked it up behind your desk yesterday morning, sir. I took it to try something last night. I was mistaken about it belonging to Gube. I got to thinking about it and I remembered seeing Mahoney wear it, not Gube. You see, them always being together like Siamese twins, sir, it was easy to get twisted up. Anyway, I tried it on Mahoney's hat and it exactly fits the thread marks where the cord was sewed to the felt. There can't be no mistake, sir."

Captain Basford had listened closely. The man's story rang true, yet once before Cardwell had been just as positive the cord belonged to Gube.

"Cardwell," said the officer sternly, "I shall think this over. And if I ever hear of you prowling in Mahoney's or any one else's tent again, I'm going to court-martial you. Understand, you have overstepped your bounds. If Mahoney

should report anything missing, you go to prison. You may go now. And remember—don't ever take anything from my tent again!"

Captain Basford hunted up the doctor at once and told him the details of his conversation with the sergeant and Cardwell.

"What do you make of it?" he finished.

"Sam Hill!" sighed the doctor, twisting a wisp of his sandy whiskers. "If only Cardwell wasn't such a deuced liar."

"I know," agreed the captain. "A man that carries tales usually does it to feather his own nest. However, Cardwell does tell the truth half of the time. But what do you think?"

Doctor Harrison pondered a moment.

"Once I knew a detective, a successful one. He didn't wear huge colored glasses or go around measuring tracks. He just moped quietly about, listening to everybody. He'd pick up a useful word or two occasionally, and in due time he would have his man, or whatever he was after."

"Then you advise letting things drift along, doctor?"

"Yes, that's my advice."

And things did rest until Saturday inspection, when Captain Basford, inspecting his company, made many complaints about his men's clothes. From time to time he glanced sharply at Mahoney, a big Irishman with a red nose and innocent gray eyes, who stood in the rear rank. When the captain reached this man, he looked at him keenly and demanded—

"Where's your hat cord?"

"Lost it, sir," replied Mahoney.

"Lost it? Where?"

"I don't know, sir. It just disappeared. I don't know when."

The captain concealed his suspicions of the Irishman and continued the inspection, but he was unable to get the fellow out of his mind all day.

That evening he and the doctor were sitting beneath the Chinese lantern that hung suspended from the limb of a mangrove tree which overspread their tents. Presently, the doctor brought up the subject of Gube and Mahoney.

"Oh, I'm tired of it all," complained the captain. "Let's forget it tonight. It's too balmy to talk on such a strenuous affair. I want to smoke and rest."

The doctor tactfully changed the topic and they were lazily enjoying their cigars when they heard rapid footsteps approaching from behind. Turning, they saw in the shifting moonlight a man coming at a trot. He paused just inside the rim of light.

"Sir—sir—" he gasped.

"Well, what now, Cardwell?" asked the captain impatiently.

"I've seen Gube, sir!"

"What!"

"Sam Hill!"

"Yes, sir." Cardwell's knees were trembling. "I saw him down by the reed thicket." He meant a canebrake which crossed the island a quarter of a mile from camp.

The captain motioned Joe to a camp stool.

"Rest yourself, Cardwell. You're all excited. Now, you say you saw Gube?"

"Yes, sir." Cardwell still panted. "I was out for a walk. Been down the island a ways, and I was coming home by the dry weather trail. All of a sudden a man dressed in white come out of the far side of the thicket. When he saw me in the moonlight he started to run."

"Which way did he run?" asked the doctor.

"He run along the side of the thicket, sir, right down to the beach. I lost him there."

"You mean you followed Gube? Which way did he go, east or west?" the captain inquired, moving nearer the Rat.

"He run east, sir, keeping close to the thicket."

"And you followed him all the way to the beach?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not. There is a pond between the beach and where you say you first saw Gube, if it was Gube. You're lying, Cardwell. Your shoes are as dry as mine."

"Maybe I mistook the little lake for the

beach in my excitement, sir," persisted Cardwell.

Doctor Harrison rose.

"Come here, Cardwell," he ordered. Under the lantern, he examined Joe's eyes closely.

"You may think I'm crazy, Doctor, but I sure saw Gube. I did. I swear it!" Cardwell backed away from the medico's peering eyes.

"You're just scared, boy. Better go to bed. Don't you think so, Captain Basford?"

The captain nodded, and Joe departed hastily.

"Any sign of a loose screw about Cardwell?" asked the captain when the sound of Joe's retreating footsteps had died away.

"No, I wasn't looking at his eyes for loose screws. Thought he might have had a few dreams, but he hasn't."

"Then you think he really saw Gube?"

"Perhaps. Let's take a lantern and go down to the pond. If Gube ran that way, we may find his tracks."

Captain Basford chuckled.

"What's funny?" demanded the doctor.

"I was just thinking of that detective of yours who never went around looking for tracks," smiled his friend. "You'll find plenty of tracks around that pond, but it will be hard to identify them. Bill Powers and his gang waded around every foot of it. Besides, I don't think Gube is anywhere near here. I have come to the conclusion that he is drowned, or else Tamboola sent him to Borneo that night he said he was out after a drifting boat."

"What about the hat and cord?"

"Well, I don't know, but I've made up my mind to spring a surprize tomorrow that will settle this thing for good. If Gube is on the island—which I don't believe—I'm going to find it out."

At seven o'clock the next morning, call-to-arms was sounded. It brought the men hurrying from their tents, buzzing with excitement. Captain Basford looked on with satisfaction. He wanted his men to have life in them. Standing before the company, he made a little speech.

"It is rumored that Private Gube is on this island and alive. If so, the man must be deranged, and before we start on a last thorough search, I want to point out to you that it is the duty of every man in this company to exercise the greatest vigilance. Remember, this is for Gube's own good. Furthermore, if there is any man present who for some reason does not wish to accompany this searching party, he may fall out."

Not a man moved.

"That is all," said the captain, and turned to instruct the first sergeant.

He received an astonishing report. Mahoney was gone.

The sergeant informed Captain Basford that Mahoney was missing from reveille. The non-com had sent men to search around the camp for Mahoney, and he was positive the man was nowhere about.

"So Mahoney has disappeared, too," repeated the captain between clinched teeth.

"No one has seen him since nine o'clock last night, sir," added the sergeant.

The captain stood silent and gloomy. He wished he had questioned Mahoney about the missing hat-cord the previous day. He would have done it, too, he thought resentfully, if the doctor had not urged him to wait.

"I'll follow my own judgment after this," he muttered.

The men combed every foot of the island, from the northern end down to Tamboola village in the southern tip.

Tamboola was not home, his son informed Captain Basford; he had gone to Sandaken.

"Sandaken!" the captain thought. "For more whisky, I suppose, and perhaps to carry Mahoney away."

Yes, that was it, he decided. Mahoney had cleared out in the night. But why? Had he obtained possession of Gube's money somehow? Had he suspected that suspicion rested on him and fled at the first opportunity?

Tamboola's son graciously permitted the white men to search the village, and when the captain gave the order to return to camp, he was satisfied that neither Gube nor Mahoney remained on the island.

"I'm through looking for Gube or any one else," he declared to the doctor that evening at supper. "But I am going to stop Tamboola from selling whisky to the men."

"I wouldn't," Doctor Harrison objected. "The quinine is about gone, and whisky is better for malaria than quinine, anyway."

"I suppose you would start a still if the medicine ran out. Go on and let me alone. I want to think."

Several hours later, the captain was still thinking. He sat at his field desk, chin in hand, eyes closed. He saw his law office in the States, shut up for nearly two years now, and he wanted to go back to it. He was tired of war and this infernal land of mosquitoes. And there were the men, ragged and some of them almost shoeless, poor devils! They wanted to go home, too. The Government had failed to act in good faith for five months. The company had been on this far away island all that time without even receiving mail.

"We're forgotten," he murmured gloomily. "Yes, that's it. The men even God has forgotten."

The flaps of the tent swung apart quickly and Doctor Harrison entered, panting. He dropped limply on to a stool facing Captain Basford, who was stricken with amazement.

"I'm not hurt nor frightened," the doctor reassured him. "Just out of breath." He asked for a drink of water and presently continued, "Been walking fast. It's an old story, nearly as old as I am, but tonight has brought it up to date."

"Go on," said the captain, as the other paused.

"When I was a boy," the doctor began, "I was walking along the old Grass Valley turnpike about dusk one evening. There was a meadow on either side of the road, and the grass had been newly mown and hauled away."

"You mean the old Slogle place?" interrupted the captain.

"Yes, that's it. Well, I strolled along, whistling softly, and all at once I saw a woman cross the road not twenty yards ahead of me. Don't laugh. She wore a black dress of some strange fashion, and on her head was a night-cap like the old women used to wear."

"Harrison!" cried the captain, leaning forward.

"I'm all right," the doctor said, waving a hand. "Well, being a bashful lad, I turned my head away for a moment, and when I looked again, my woman was gone. There was a wire fence on either side of the pike and no cover of any sort for a quarter of a mile. Where did she go?" The doctor drew a long breath. "Of course, there was no woman there, and yet I saw her as plainly as I see you now."

"What are you getting at, Doctor?" the captain asked tensely.

"I took a little stroll this evening. I reckon I was about half way to the village when I turned back to camp. I stopped on the far side of the bamboo thicket for a few moments to look at the moon—it's unusually beautiful tonight—and when I brought my gaze back to the path to go on, I couldn't move. Just ahead of me stood Slim Gube, looking straight at me."

"Gube!" the captain repeated, as the doctor stopped. "Did you speak to him?"

"No. His sudden appearance and odd dress startled me and I didn't collect myself immediately. He wore a pair of white trousers and nothing at all above the waist. He was so close to me I could see his beautiful white teeth, and a breath of wind stirred his hair. Whether it was Gube in the flesh or not, I saw him. But listen to the rest of it.

"I turned my eyes away, just to see if I were dreaming, I suppose, and when I looked again a few seconds later he was gone. There wasn't even a sound."

"You certainly seem perfectly rational, Doctor, but this story is very strange."

"I know that, Captain Basford. It has upset my nerves completely, and I

want something to steady them. Do you care to join me?" The doctor arose.

"What is it? Pills?" smiled the captain.

"No, it's under a cork that's never been lifted. Ha! Your face changes at that. Well, come along."

Before they left the tent, a shot rang out from the far side of the camp, piercing the stillness.

"Halt!" cried a voice, and two shots followed in rapid succession.

The officers rushed toward the place the sounds appeared to come from. The company street was filling with confused men. Bayonet scabbards rattled and rifle bolts shoving home cartridges clicked.

"He run down by the beach!" some one shouted.

"You mean he fell on the beach. You shot before challenging, Cardwell, and you're off your post," yelled another voice.

"Who's off his post?" Captain Basford demanded as he ran up to the corporal of the guard. "You say some one is shot?"

"Cardwell quit his post, sir. I think he shot Gube. It looked like him. The man must be crazy. He didn't have any shirt or hat on."

Half a dozen men were running toward the beach.

"Well!" said the captain to Cardwell, who had returned to his post. "Don't you know your general orders? You're certainly in for a court martial. Why did you shoot before challenging. Take his rifle, Corporal of the Guard."

Fifty men, hissing and snarling, were edging toward Cardwell.

"Stand back, men!" the captain commanded. "Stand back, I say."

But the men were not in a mood to stand back. They did not hear the officer's words. All eyes were fastened on Cardwell.

"Rat! Rat! Hang the Rat!" a voice shouted, and others took it up.

Cardwell fell at his commander's feet, cringing.

"Get a rope!" yelled some one. "A tent rope!"

The numbers of the mob had swelled to ninety by now. They surged furiously forward. Captain Basford was unarmed. He angrily ordered the men to halt and moved slowly backward, Cardwell crawling at his feet.

The corporal of the guard attempted to gain some control of the situation, but he, too, was helplessly engulfed in the frenzied onrush.

"Powers!" the captain called at the top of his voice. "Bill Powers, stop these men!"

Powers had been ordered on post in Cardwell's stead. Now the captain's command had relieved him of that duty, and running forward, he stationed himself between the officer and the men. He brought his rifle down to a charge.

"Men," he said coolly, "men, stand back!"

Gradually there came a lull in the angrily humming voices.

"Bill," called somebody from the back of the crowd. "Bill, you ain't gone back on us for that Rat, have you?"

Before Powers could reply, a man who had gone to the beach to look for Gube's body came back.

"Gube ain't nowhere about the beach," he said, speaking to no one in particular.

"Look!" screamed Cardwell suddenly. "There is a man inside the woodpile. There is a fire in there!"

"It is a man, all right," affirmed Doctor Harrison, who had worked his way through the mob. "See, he's closing himself in with sticks of wood."

At the captain's command, the corporal of the guard took Cardwell in charge and marched him off to the tent reserved for confinement of prisoners.

Captain Basford led the way to the woodpile. Sure enough, there was a fire burning inside, its rays shining through a small hole in the rick. The captain began pulling sticks out of the stack, and in a few moments, he was inside a large room which had been carefully cribbed with select pieces of short timber.

On one side of the space were three large boxes, brimming with wet corn meal that gave off an unmistakable odor to a

man of the Cumberlands. Across the room was an old still which had been sent to Sibutu to make distilled water for the company. The apparatus had been found inadequate and had been marked "obsolete" and stored with the quartermaster's supplies.

"Sam Hill!" ejaculated the doctor, coming inside and sniffing.

"That's what I say," groaned Captain Basford.

Slim Gube, grinning sheepishly, stood before the two officers. In one corner of the room, dead to the world, lay Mahoney.

"Your little game is up at last, Gube," remarked the captain. "Do you realize that you are a deserter?"

"Ain't been out of sight of camp, sir."

Two jugs stood on the ground. Doctor Harrison picked one up, removed its floating corks, smelled it and tasted the contents.

"What proof is it, Gube?" he asked, smacking his lips.

"One hundred and four, sir. It's got to be that to kill malaria."

"Uh-huh." The doctor drank again. "Here, Captain, try this," he invited, offering the jug.

"No, thanks," the captain refused. "This man is going to be court-martialed."

"Sam Hill," protested the other, "how can you charge a man with making whisky if you don't taste it?"

The captain smiled wryly and tasted, while Doctor Harrison carefully sampled the contents of the second jug.

"Gube," he declared with a wink, "you can't make me believe this is one hundred and four."

"Yes, sir, 'tis," Gube insisted, understanding.

"Don't believe it. Here, Captain, am I right?" He exchanged jugs with his brother officer.

The captain sipped from the jug twice.

"It's whisky, all right, and Gube will have to stand trial for appropriating Government property to his own use."

"I didn't take the still and the meal for my own use, sir."

"That's a thin excuse. Who did you take them for?" demanded the captain ungrammatically.

"For the sick fellows. Since I started this shebang, sir, not one man has turned up his toes, and the hospital is empty. There's not a case of malaria in camp."

"The boy is right," Doctor Harrison interposed. "Come with me a moment, Captain Basford."

The two officers, each carrying a jug, emerged from the wood pile.

"So Mahoney was in cahoots with Gube," the captain ground out. "He probably lost his hat cord on the beach helping Gube wreck that boat. That was a fine hoax! I see it all now. Mahoney has been carrying this stuff around while Gube ran the still. I'll court-martial Mahoney, too!"

It seemed to be the captain's day for court-martialing.

The doctor gestured with his jug.

"Listen to wisdom, Captain. Gube has done a lot of good and no harm. If you, as company commander, charge him with appropriating a still to his own use, and as commissary officer try him for stealing corn meal, you will have to approve all these charges as commanding officer. Look at the work you'll make yourself. You'll be writing letters to and from Captain Basford a year from now. Quash the whole thing, I say."

"But the discipline," began the captain weakly.

A wild yell went up from the camp street.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Here she is!"

"Who is she?" called Doctor Harrison, stubbing his toe in his excitement and lunging precipitately forward. "Where is she?"

"Look! There's a ship coming in! Thank God! A ship at last!" the captain shouted. "Yes, by gosh, we'll quash it all and go home."

He swung the jug above his head and casting his dignity to the winds, ran toward the beach like a small boy.

Concluding

OLD FATHER OF WATERS

A Novel of old steamboating days on the Mississippi

By Alan LeMay

LEFT penniless when his sternwheeler *Peter Swain* burned up in passage, Arnold Huston, steamboat captain, returned to his home at Natchez, where he quarreled with his rich cousin, Will Huston. A duel resulted. Neither was harmed, but Will fainted from excitement. The enmity of the two increased.

Arnold's second in the affair, a suave young gentleman called Mark Wallace, offered to go into partnership with him in buying up and refitting the old *Frontier City*. With borrowed money, and with a black crew loaned on the strength of Arnold's word alone, the boat was taken over and an astute old Scotch engineer undertook to overhaul the ancient engines.

Meanwhile Arnold had made the acquaintance of Jacqueline DuMoyne, a beautiful Creole woman, whose husband, Andrea, tempestuous and dissolute, had disappeared a long time before, after a dagger fight in the dark with a mysterious person called Jean Fouchet. Arnold and Jacqueline came to care for each other. Will Huston, however, had the impression that Arnold was paying court to Caroline Shepherd, daughter of a wealthy planter, and hinted that Arnold's attentions were presumptuous.

Another quarrel resulted, and in revenge Will bought up all the notes on the *Frontier City* and threatened to call them at once. Mark Wallace, angered that Arnold should thus further have involved the security of their investment, forced Arnold to offer him a ninety-day option for his share of the boat. This settled, Arnold came to his cousin with the bald challenge to a match-race between his boat, renamed the *Arnold Huston*, and the *Galloping Betsy*, Will's fastest steamboat, the course to be from New Orleans to Memphis, and winner to take both boats! Being a sportsman, besides being Arnold's enemy, Will accepted without hesitation.

While work was feverishly progressing aboard his boat, Arnold payed a hurried visit to Jacqueline and found her strangely troubled. The reason he soon discovered in a black-cloaked figure who had lately been prowling around her house. Arnold espied him, dashed outdoors and seized him. The man wore a black mask which Arnold tore away in anger. A grinning, noseless face leered up into his own. Overcome with horror, Arnold let the man slip away. But the next night, coming upon this man with the death's-head face ensconced in a chair in the

Du-Moyne home, Arnold received a still greater shock when Jacqueline informed him that the monster was Andrea Du-Moyne, her husband.

Back aboard the *Arnold Huston*, with the race but a few hours off, Arnold proceeded to drink himself into insensibility—amid the bustle of preparations for the test that would make or break him. Heretofore admired up and down the length of the Mississippi for his temperance and dependability, he was now despised by his own officers. His young mate in desperation slapped him vigorously in the face, doused him with several bucketfuls of ice-cold water, fed him hot coffee and brought him out of his stupor. Their pilot had been hurt ashore; some one must take his place.

But now Arnold was quite apathetic, no longer had the slightest interest in the race. Just then he received a note from Mark Wallace, saying he was going to fight a duel with Andrea DuMoyne, and begging Arnold to reciprocate past courtesy by acting as his second.

Feeling bound by loyalty, Arnold trudged all over town in a vain attempt to find Wallace; at length coming to the DuMoyne home, he found it quite deserted. He returned to the boat and announced it must race without him, even though he was the only man available to guide the craft in the treacherous reaches that composed the race-course. His men doubted his courage, sneered behind his back as he stumbled off to his stateroom. A faint, well remembered fragrance greeted his nostrils. He lifted blank eyes; before him stood Jacqueline.

"I am ready to go where you go," she said. "I couldn't stand that empty house any longer."

"Where's Mark?" Arnold managed to ask.

"I don't know," she said.

XXX

TOMMY CRAIG stood on the rim of the boiler-deck, leaning on the forward rail. In spite of his all-night labors he felt no weariness; only a deep disgust and a revolted dismay. Captain Huston should have been the backbone of his boat, the very heart of her effort; instead, he had won the contempt of them all. Yet the boat was the thing, the same boat that they had given their labors to, unchanged by the defection of her captain. Craig was loyal to her still, with the loyalty of the young.

Ashore, the crowd had grown in the last few minutes, increasing with startling suddenness from the two-score loafers that had been there since daylight to a mob of several hundreds. Groups were on the *Elizabeth Grey*, chatting excitedly with the officers; groups on the *Arnold Huston*, friends of the crew. A hum of voices rose from the people on the boats and the crowd on the slope of the cobbled levee, a continual mutter laced with

shouts of encouragement, disparagement, humorous advice.

Suddenly there was the rumble of a bass drum, and a bursting blare of brass. A band that had straggled down the levee had formed in front of the *Elizabeth Grey*, and now exploded into tumult. The swinging beat of an old marching song swayed the crowd ashore. On the *Elizabeth Grey* gay pennons blossomed. Long strings of them—red, blue, orange, purple, green, gold—ran up all over the boat, reeled into place by waiting hands. Will Huston was a showman! The crowd burst into cheers above the music as the stars and stripes ran up the *Grey's* jackstaff.

Aboard the *Huston* there were no pennons, no band, only the flag that had fluttered from the jackstaff since dawn. Even that would have been forgotten, except that a watchman had thought of it.

For the spectacular success of the *Grey's* display Tommy Craig felt a curling contempt. Even so, there was something daunting in the cheers of the crowd, the blare of the band and the new gayety of the skeleton *Grey*, as if she were decked with victory already. Something daunting, but lifting too, a challenge to be answered by the *Huston's* engines.

Craig's head was up, his lower lip thrust out; his reddened eyes smoldered and burned in his head, and from behind his face every trace of the ubiquitous laughter was gone. A spirit of supreme recklessness was upon him. He was acting captain now—more of a captain, he felt, than Huston would be again. The man whose name she carried had done what he could to take the living heart out of her, but it couldn't be done. They'd flog and batter her through to victory somehow. Braced with coffee and lashed with words, Huston would have to be made to steer an even channel, though he had failed them in every other thing.

Captain Sawkes came running up to his boiler-deck, knowing, as every one on the river did, where Huston would be found when he was in command.

"Where's your captain?" he called across, coming to the rail.

"He's pilotin'. Harry Masters has smashed his head and is like to die. Huston has pilot's papers and I have captain's. You and me for it, Sawkes." He added, "Huston's takin' the second watch," in answer to Sawkes' glance to the pilot-house where Nate Lacrosse stood.

"The devil!" said Sawkes, sincerely sympathetic. "I'm sorry to hear that. How'd it happen?"

"Fell off his horse on the way here," Craig told him.

"Isn't that hell? Like to die, you say. Good man, Masters. Hope this doesn't put you boys out too much."

"We'll have to worry along," said Craig levelly. "Personally I'd rather have Huston up than Masters, given the choice. Nice hand on the spokes."

"It's a damned shame, anyway." Sawkes' thick gold watch was in his hand. "Well, first boat to Natchez—is that right?"

"That's my understandin'."

"I wish they'd made the race to Memphis, like they started to. Well, maybe Natchez will be far enough. Are we ready?"

Craig yelled up to Nate Lacrosse.

"MacMaugh ready? Tell him 'Stand by'!"

"He's standin' by," Lacrosse called back.

Sawkes smiled, perhaps at Craig's nervousness, perhaps at the looseness of the *Huston's* coordination.

"Well, let's get going then. Natchez it is! You're to back inshore, and I offshore, you know. You ring when you're clear, and I'll ring when I'm up; and the brawl is on. Right?"

"Right." Their voices were almost drowned in the blare of the band.

"Well, good luck—captain!"

"Good luck to you."

They leaned far out over the rails to clasp hands.

A moment later the captain's bell on the *Grey* rang heavily, paused, spoke

three times more. Answering jingles through the pilot-house to the engine-room. Sawkes disappeared to the boiler-deck, where he preferred to stand. There was a shouting of her mate, a stamping of bare feet, and slowly the *Betsy Grey* wangled herself free of the *Huston*, free of the levee, drawing herself with a surprizing swift strength backward out into the stream.

Craig waited. Then the *Huston's* bells went through their routine, Craig shouting from above. With smooth ease the *Huston* sent the levee drifting rapidly away from her. Craig thrilled to the whoofing snort of her steam:

"Up—river! Up—river!"

They were on their way.

THE STORY of the next fifteen hours is the story of the breaking of a man's heart.

There was sunlight on the river as Huston appeared on deck again, shimmering sunlight all up and down the reaches of the Mississippi, making the memory of the night-mist seem an impossible thing. The coffee-colored flood flowed smooth under the sun, rippled only enough by the larboard breeze to make it glint and spark in the morning light. The vast river swept past under them with a strong swing and pull, mud-colored, glimmering, silently parading its broad waters to the sea as it does today, as it had done for a thousand years.

How long Huston had been in his stateroom he did not know. Nor did the others on the boat, for their interest had now been engaged in a happening more dramatic than the vagaries of this man whom they no longer hoped to understand. That he had not been on deck at the start of the race was outrageous to them, incomprehensible. They did not hope to account for anything further he might do.

Yet there was not one of them who looked him in the face who could fail to perceive that—most incomprehensible circumstance of all—Huston came out of his room a changed man.

"Drugs," whispered Jean Brule. "He's loaded to the guards with some kind o' drug!"

And that was what they were forced to believe. In the hours that followed, when Huston had disproved that theory beyond all doubt, they gave up the understanding of him forever.

Tommy Craig, who met him on the boiler-deck as he stepped from the cabin, instantly noticed the change. Huston was washed and combed, dressed now as a captain on a packet should have been on the great day of his boat. Craig, embittered almost past recall, sneered to himself.

"When the boat is startin' out to run her heart out for him, and everybody else is standin' by with his guts in his teeth, this buzzard is changin' his collar!"

But the collar was not all. The heavy spider-webbed shadow that had lain on Huston's face was gone. In its place was a new quiet—the quiet of a fatality that was at once a forecast and a demand. It was as if there were now stone behind the face where there had been only river water before. A man hardly noticed that the whites were bloodshot in those steel eyes, so level, so quiet, so hard, that they gave the illusion of being clear.

Huston's eyes struck into Craig's face for a moment in an unreadable gaze. He could read the contempt, the puzzlement behind a certain desperation in the eyes of the mate; it gave him a sense of distance and detachment from the youngster he had known so well, whose character he helped to make. He felt that he would never have Craig's confidence again. Yet there was no hope of explanation, nothing he could say. It was only left to hold his old air of command, colder and harder now, where grins and reckless swagger had served before.

All this passed through his mind in the instant it took the tail of his eye to catch the position of the *Betsy Grey*. There was no room there for personal things after that. By their place in the river he knew that they were less than an hour under way. Incredibly, that short

interval had been enough to put Will Huston's boat in the lead.

The great square-standing bulk of the *Elizabeth Grey* lay close off their larboard bow, so near that the curved guards of her stern were hardly five fathoms away. She was holding as close inshore as she dared, but not quite able yet to swing across in front of them into the slightly slacker water in which the *Huston* ran. If she continued to gain as she must have in the hour past they would soon be trailing in her wake. Already the living hills of water that the *Grey's* starboard paddles churned up were breaking against the *Huston's* bow.

He stared for perhaps a full minute before he walked to the rail with fixed eyes, like a man asleep. The expression of his face did not change, except by that fixity itself; but long minutes more passed while he studied that gap of brown water between, trying to judge whether or not she still gained. His voice was quiet and level as he turned at last to Tommy Craig.

"How did this happen?"

"It ain't Nate Lacrosse's fault," Craig instantly defended. "That Bob Carey they got pilotin' the *Grey* is a fool for luck and a dog for guts, that's all. You know what he did? He turned straight for the middle o' that bluff reef off Saul's Point, where everybody hugs the shore. And got by, by God! That's how he gained the distance on us. Lacrosse took his own channel. He done right. Carey'll pile his boat up, if he plays the fool like that!"

There was a little too much gusto in Craig's defense, casting a suspicion on the sincerity he sought to feel. In his heart he must have blamed Lacrosse for this first edge the *Grey* gained, but above all he was against the captain, the dominating man whom he could not understand.

"There couldn't 'a' been half a finger between her keel and the reef, at this stage," Craig piled on. He swung to another tune. "This here breeze is heavin' us into the bank—we're blowin' crosswise like we had sails. How the hell can we make time with the engines fightin' the rudder every stroke?"

It was a gross exaggeration, but it had a grain of truth. Anyway, it seemed to serve.

"Get the axes," said Huston. "Smash out every window she's got, sash and all. The doors are all right hooked back as they are. Wait a minute! Leave the windows in my stateroom and in the one opposite, and see that those doors are closed. Everythin' else out, includin' pilot-house and galley."

"Why d'you want to leave—" Craig began.

"Wind balances, like cargo," Huston suggested, "bow and stern. You've already forgotten what I told you about loadin' a steamboat."

"Crazy as a whirligig," Craig grumbled to himself as he turned away. But he did as he was told, and no more.

While the axes rang to the splintering of wood and the crashing of glass, Huston walked slowly over the boat. If there was a tenseness of nerves in his body it was shown in the stiffness of his walk, curiously like that of a strange dog who circles another. They had never seen his face harsher, more austere. The spark in the gray of his eye had a deeper, more smoldering source than the blaze of instant command. The fatality was strong in his face now. Even the negroes sensed it. It carried them along, held them to their work.

"Your fool in the pilot-house knows nothing of his river," said MacMaugh. "You see what he's lost us already, man? If we lose in the end the fault will be his!"

Before Huston's eyes the irony in MacMaugh's gave way to an expression which he could not read. The truth was that it was merely of puzzlement, such as came into all who faced him now. They cursed and sneered at him, behind his back; and to his face they were confused, seeking to cover the suspicion that they now held in common. All but MacMaugh, whose reasonings were more obscure.

"I'm takin' the wheel in a minute," said Huston. "It'll be a different story then."

"Well," said MacMaugh, "we'll see."

He approached the pilot-house at last, while from below continued the complaint of shattered wood and the cracking ring of falling glass. He climbed slowly, still walking like an inspecting dog who keeps long lips over his teeth, yet seems so deadly close to baring his fangs in a belly-ripping snap that others near him walk carefully, watching what they do.

He had often run up those stairs before. In spite of his controlled tensity he was trying to husband his strength, saving everything he had for the work ahead.

In the high-standing square cage, axes had already knocked out the sides of glass. The twelve-foot wheel stood from its slot in the floor like a rising moon, its lower half invisible below; at one side of it Nate Lacrosse stood uneasily. His close-cropped bullet head was bare, and the collar had been ripped from his sun-coarsened neck. He turned to Huston a knobby face in which the squinted eyes seemed sunk with a nail punch, and shook his head.

"She's pullin' out on us," he said.

"Why?" said Huston.

"God knows," said Lacrosse uncertainly. "Maybe we ain't got the guts under us." Huston said nothing to that. Lacrosse added, "Mebbe we'll ketch 'em in the night stretch. I dunno how Bob Carey's doin' some o' the things he's done, 'less it's by lookin' at the water an' guessin'. I say he's guessin' wrong; luck may break on him an' pile him up. Off Saul's Point—"

"I heard about that," said Huston.

"Well, we'll see what they got in the night run. Might outfox 'em, they're so damned smart."

Huston stood leaning against one of the high seats along the side of the house, his face quiet with that odd combination of grimness and peace. He studied the river. For a long time his eyes never left the surface of the glinting brown water.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, yet definitely as the long miles passed, the *Elizabeth Grey* was pulling away. A foot gain; a yard; a fathom; a rod. She no longer lay to the larboard of the *Huston*, but dead ahead; a narrow crossing had accomplished that. For an hour he watched that widening gap, until he could endure it no more.

"Let me hold her a minute, Nate."

The man with the sun-tortured eyes relinquished the wheel and sat down. Lacrosse talked no more; out of sight behind Huston's back he was forgotten, no more in Huston's mind than as if he had been a ploughman in a cotton-field miles back from the river.

Craig, his work of demolition done, climbed to the pilot-house and sat unheeded beside Lacrosse. Others came—clerks, watchmen, the engineer off duty. They stood behind Huston, watching the *Elizabeth Grey*, studying the water. Occasionally they talked in low mumbles. As far as Huston was concerned, they might not have been there.

At the end of an hour Lacrosse said—"Want me—"

For an instant Huston's eyes returned to the man as if puzzled that he was still there.

"I'll stand this watch Nate. Get some rest."

It was a long time before any one spoke to him again. It was the river, more even the ascendant rival boat that held their eyes. Under the mile-wide surface of the flood lay a single twisting channel, and one only; forking sometimes, but always with only one way that was best. It crossed invisible under the river; it traced close along thicket-dense shores where branches touched the stanchions over the guards; it wavered in midstream, or struck squarely, sometimes, to the river's opposite side.

Among the ten or eleven in the pilot-house now, perhaps one besides Huston and Lacrosse knew that hidden channel under the breadth of the river so that he could have followed it at night. Of the rest, nearly every one could tell its general curve by treacherous surface indications which only experienced rivermen could read. It was the battle of the

opposed pilots that they were watching now. The great engines in both boats were already giving everything they had, laboring at a pace that they must hold for eighteen hours yet, before the end would begin to be near.

From time to time they turned to hold for a moment each other's eyes, or to mutter behind their hands. Huston was out-piloting Bob Carey; not conspicuously—no man could have done that—but so definitely that it was apparent to them all. A few feet cut off here, a moment's hesitation saved there—he was saving his boat all a man could. The *Huston* lay true in her marks, her rudder idle during every moment it could be spared.

Yet—the *Elizabeth Grey* pulled away.

They knew what manner of night Huston had spent. They knew, or thought they did, what had been his best piloting before now. Once more he was surprizing them, this time by piloting better than he himself knew that he could. He was giving the boat more than he knew he had, that over-the-head effort that a man sometimes achieves when all he has is called for, and he finds that he can give more. Not an effort of brawn; Nate Lacrosse was there to help spin the stubborn wheel when she had to go hard over; only the hour after hour application of infinite judgment, delicately balanced skill and the nervous tension that saps the brain and heart out of a man and leaves him an empty shell of muscle and bone.

"This is an iron man," said a whispering voice.

"Drug—goin' to wear off," said Brule.

"He'll crack up pretty quick," Craig murmured. "It ain't in him to go like that long."

He didn't crack, nor waver; the hour stretched to two, three, four; it was noon. The *Grey* had opened a considerable stretch of water by then. They saw figures on the *Elizabeth Grey*, where before they had seen faces and the color of eyes.

"Ain'tcha goin' to go eat?" asked Lacrosse.

"You eat," said Huston. Lacrosse went without demur. He was soon back.

"I'll take her now."

"Get some coffee up here," said Huston. "I'll finish a six-hour watch."

He could not bear to leave the wheel with the *Grey* pulling away. He drank his coffee slowly, in an easy stretch of water; but the sandwiches they brought him remained untouched.

Two hours more. A widened gap. If Huston's face had been grim before, it was now drawn and gripped as if under invisible harsh hands.

"Oh, God!" Craig suddenly burst out as they momentarily lost the *Grey* around a bend. "She's got us!"

"We've got a long run yet."

"We'll see come night," Lacrosse began again, and his voice mumbled and trailed off. He drew himself up from the bench, as wearily as if it had been himself who had stood the six-hour watch. Indeed there had been no decision, no press of the wheel which he had not vicariously shared. "Your watch is up, Captain. I'll take her now."

"No," said Huston. "We'll be in the Sangamon reach pretty soon. I've got a trick I'll spring on him there. Your chance is coming, Nate. Get some rest."

Sangamon reach was an hour away. Glances shuttled back and forth, silently formed words. There was no argument, though. It had not been drugs on which Huston had taken his brace; they could see that now. Drugs would long ago have worn off, and the *Huston* was lying deadly true in her marks.

"Get out those axes, Tommy," said Huston unexpectedly. "Strip her clean as a hound's tooth."

"Strip?"

"Get off that filigree stuff—rails—anything that will come clear that catches an inch of breeze."

For half an hour after that the axes rang again, smashing away an acre or so of gingerbread and jig-sawed rail, all the white-painted lacy wood that was the pride, in those days, of the river boats. She was a sorry sight when the axes were

done, looking naked and wrecked; but they imagined, at least, that the breeze troubled her less. And still the *Elizabeth Grey* pulled away. She gained a fifth of a mile.

Sangamon reach came and went. Nothing gained there. They knew that Mike O'Farrell had replaced Bob Carey at the *Grey's* wheel, by now, and he knew a trick or two as well. Nate fidgeted.

"There's the reach behind us," he said "Yo're tard. Lemme swing her some."

Huston said—

"Not yet." They brought him coffee again. He remembered to drink it, by the time it was almost cold.

Ten hours at the wheel, a hard stretch from the viewpoint of physical effort alone, in those days before automatic control, when a man turned a boat with his hands. He could not let her go, give her up to other hands while she was losing so, take away from her the supreme effort that he could trust only himself to give. Not yet. He did not reason that. He could not bear to turn from her, that was all.

"Captain, you better lemme—"

"I'll finish out this watch, Nate. Get some rest. Only a little while more."

"It's two hours more to the regular end of the watch, figgerin' two men's watches from where you started from, an' I—"

"I know."

Again those shuttling glances among the men that crowded the pilot-house. They had eaten twice, and come and gone and returned again while he stood at the great wheel with gray, bitter-carved face and undershadowed eyes. He steered her though; no man could deny him that. Huston whistled through the speaking tube to MacMaugh for the first time since he had taken the wheel.

They could hear the engineer's voice answer, unfamiliar as it came pinched through the tube.

"Aye."

"Throw in your oil."

Thin through the tube—

"Aye."

The watchers in the pilot-house stirred. They had been waiting for that. A new suspense, a forlorn hope that now the tables would turn, came over them all.

The Huston did not respond at once. The new fuel meant greater heat, more steam, supposedly more speed. It took time for that, though. The sun was down, and the dusk thickening. Faint streamers of mist were rising from the river in long upward-swooping veils, to lose themselves like smoke in the dusk. Against the crimson afterglow the smoke of the *Elizabeth Grey* trailed fuzzily black, a long slow blur of darkness like the ghost of a mammoth rope. Through the glassless frame of the pilot-house the light wind swept with a new damp chill.

Their eyes were on the mouths of the *Huston's* stacks, where the heavy perpetual rolls of smoke poured from the coroneted tops of the black twin columns, five fathoms forward, to their right and left. Presently they saw it subtly change to greasier billows, heavier, thicker, more profuse. The oil was in. A rattling bit of wood fell silent; and another, of higher thinner voice, took up the song. A new tremor came into the timbers of the *Huston*. The men who watched behind the wheel stirred, sat silent with strained eyes.

Twenty minutes without preceptible change. Then, as they steamed ploughing around a bend, the *Grey* came into view again, closer, more distinct than before. Perceptibly the *Huston* had gained!

A half an hour, forty minutes, while the humped, long-lived hills of water from the *Huston's* paddles dropped away behind, and the ancient undying current slid silently under them with a strong swing and pull. A trace of foam, a thin line of turned-over water showed at the *Huston's* bow beyond the guards. And she crept up, and crept up, and crept up, with a new power as if she were never again to be denied. In that hour a full fourth of her lost distance was regained.

Thickening dusk. Not so easy to read the surface of the water now. Nate

Lacrosse rose, paced, sat down; it seemed to him that the iron man of a pilot was taking long chances now, was going to throw away his boat in the very hour that the song of victory was surging up from her engines, and the love of won battle breathing in the murmur of her steam. And still they gained, and gained, and gained. Incredibly a third of the hated gap was eaten by the furious iron monsters below.

In the dusk, as Huston turned his back to the wheel to sight astern, his eyes seemed set in black hollows in which they were visible only as half-hidden gleams. No sign of exultation there, while the rest were coming joyfully to their feet, gripping each other's arms, muttering oaths in sheer blessing of the living hope that had died to rise again. No sign in Huston's face, unless it was in the increased grip of that devouring strain of giving better than he owned. Eleven hours at the wheel now, twenty-seven on his feet, and—

"God, man, how she lays in her marks!"

From below arose the chanting of negroes, now a single ringing tenor voice alone, now the swell of a roaring score, a great surge of sound twisted with weird primitive harmonies, powerful in a rhythm like a tomtom beat.

"Ol' arn steamboat,
Golden arn steamboat,
Come along, come along home!

Whoopin' up de ribba,
Push away dat ribba,
Come along, come along home!"

Breathless voices, most of those in the chorus, breathless with long back-breaking toil; yet blooming with the jungle-lust of the chase, pouring something indescribable into the soul of the boat herself, along with the wrung sweat from their bodies that went with the fuel into the inferno. They knew down there, they knew what their fresh work had done; and out of the sweat and the stench and the fire-glare heat of the boilers came that booming voice of the pack, lifting the spirit of the boat on its crest, as the fires that they fed drove her engines on.

In the thickening dark they could no longer see the smoke of the *Elizabeth Grey* when the other boat began to drench her fires in oil, yet they sensed that it was done. A silence fell in the pilot-house again as they strained their eyes to verify, by the running lights of the *Grey*, what their riverman's sixth sense told them—that the *Huston* had ceased to gain.

The chant from below had fallen away, exhausted, by the time it was certain to them all that the *Grey* was once more pulling away. There was one hour more, Huston's twelfth hour at the wheel in that insane watch, wherein he tried to bring his boat up by his own skill alone. Slowly, slowly the *Grey* pulled away, more slowly indeed than the Huston had come up; yet preceptibly, inexorably, while the *Huston* was giving all she had. The man at the wheel turned once to the tube, but turned away again without signaling below. Without turning for foolish verification to MacMaugh, he knew definitely and finally that there was nothing more in the world that they could do, except to go on, and go on, and go on, through the hours of the night, to the end already written by the fates.

Yet he played out that hour, in one final effort, guiding his boat as she never was steered before, and not again, frozen to the wheel, unable to give up. Until at last, as they made the bend into a long reach in which they had been certain they would sight the *Galloping Betsy*, their searching eyes found only the lanterns of a raft, and a wallowing scow.

Silence, with underneath it the droning, murmuring song of the boat and the steam. Then—

"Nate."

Huston's arms dropped as Lacrosse sprang to the wheel. He turned, and for a moment stood swaying on his legs, looking from one to the other, meeting their eyes. His face was terrible in its grayness, in its immeasurably advanced

age; the gleams in the dark hollows of his eyes were surface lights now. He stood looking at them, and they thought he was going to speak, but he did not.

Unsteadily he found the door and went lurching and stumbling down the steps, his hand gripping the rail.

Behind him in the pilot-house, silence; none stirred except the bullet-headed man at the wheel who threw his weight on the spokes, wheeling her into yet another crossing that lengthened their way. Then suddenly Craig sprang up and raced down the steps after Huston.

He overtook him on the hurricane-roof. His arm went about the captain's body.

"It ain't your fault," he blurted out. "God knows no pilot ever stood a better watch than that there!"

"Almighty God," said Huston in a dead voice, "how that boat can run—"

A vile reek of burned oil, blurred lights of lanterns, a long black hulk of shore drifting downstream with the flood; beneath their feet the tremor of the boat that was giving the very soul of her without avail.

XXXI

HE HAD forgotten Jacqueline, until he entered his stateroom again, and found her there. It was typical of the man that his instant thought as his eyes found her again was of the pressure of the steam.

"Here," he said almost bruskly, "come with me."

He took her to the farthest stateroom at the rear of the boat, a narrow little cell above the transom of the hull.

"Why did you do that?"

"My stateroom is over the boilers," he told her. Then, with the fragment of a one-sided smile, "I think it should be cooler for you here."

He closed the door after them and stood leaning with his back against it.

"Is—" she started to ask him about the boat, but the question died, for she could read the answer in his face. In her eyes there was infinite pity.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you haven't had anything to eat all day."

"I couldn't touch anything, dear."

For a moment, in his weariness, he took her at her word, though he said—

"I'll get something in a minute."

She was standing before him relaxed, her veined slender hands quiet at her sides, her solemn eyes caressing his face. He was wondering at the beauty of her, the delicate sensitiveness of her pale face, the gentleness of her dark eyes. He was aware of other things—the rounded modeling of her shoulders, the dark softness of her hair, the tiny pulse that beat in the hollow of her throat like the heart of a bird.

He knew how he must appear as he stood before her now, sooted, disheveled, unshaven, with hollow dull eyes. There was no question, either, that his defeat was shown in every line. There would have been no concealing that, even had he desired it in time.

He said—

"I'd give my life to win for you tonight."

Her eyes melted, and she leaned toward him with such appeal that he caught her in his arms. He kissed her, but even as their lips met he was swayed by a weary dizziness, so that she had to steady him in her arms.

A powerful realization welled up into him that she loved him in spite of the dirt, and the ugly weariness, and the defeat; loved this empty, worthless shell of a man, whipped and broken on the very flood of the river that he loved, the only field of action in which he could pretend to amount to anything.

"Poor Arnold! You must lie down."

Absently he said—

"I'll have another watch to stand."

"All the more reason."

"If I once give in and sleep—"

Her gentle soft hands covered his face.

"Pretty soon we'll be in Natchez—" Natchez, Natchez, rang in his head. How he had longed to make fast time to Natchez! "I'll see the house where you were born, and where you lived when you

were a little boy; and all this struggle will be done with, and we'll start life over again, a new life, together. Now, lie down."

Her voice was quieting him as it had so long ago when first he met her, at the end of those black, sleepless hours following the loss of the *Swain*. Under the touch of her voice and hands the grip of the battle strain subtly loosened, like harsh biting chains that were falling away. Yet the habits of his mind were strong, and a moment later she knew that he was listening to the engines again. Slowly she felt him stiffen under her hands.

"Arnold! What is it?"

"Listen!"

She heard nothing but the perpetual churr of the water from the wheels, the vibrant moan of the striving boat. But to his ears had come a new note, a hidden grinding complaint scarcely audible under the muffling drone of sound—some warning voice that came to his ears alone.

"Something—something in the engines," he told her vaguely.

"You mustn't worry about that now. Your other watch—"

He gently freed himself of her arms. In his weariness the habit of his thought channeled irrevocably in old grooves. The race was lost; it did not matter what new thing was wrong, or where. Yet he answered the engines' call like a mechanical thing, a tired animal trained to old ways.

Below, in the engine-room, the tall, gangling form of MacMaugh stood with arms loosely folded, slouched against a stanchion in the lantern light. The shag of his forelock was matted black with grease where his oily hands had run through it; it hung stringily before the steel eyes in the craggy face. One cheek was distended by a great chew of tobacco, the first Huston had ever seen him use. About him throbbed and groaned and pulsed a vortex of sound, the organ-thunder of the fighting engines.

There was more than weariness in the droop of MacMaugh's shoulders; the attitude of momentary waiting was gone from his bearing. Incongruously, in that labored room in the heart of the boat, MacMaugh seemed for once in his life at rest. It was a moment's illusion, soon gone. As Huston stepped into the thick oil-reeking heat MacMaugh lifted his eyes, hard and sharp through his forelock, eyes bleak and cold with the torment of an acceptance that could no longer be postponed.

The engineer's eyes dropped again, as if he had not recognized the captain's hag-ridden face. Huston's glance drifted over the moving shadows of the engine-room, subconsciously noticing certain things—MacMaugh's hat hung over the face of the steam-gage, a heavy block of wood driven fast between the arm of the safety valve and the beam above. What hazardous pressure she was carrying no one knew or cared; the block holding down the valve arm assured that no consideration of caution should let a pound of power escape.

Huston's ears were hearing only that new grinding sound that had come into the engine chorus.

"What is it?"

"Wrist pin in the starboard cylinder." Close-lipped words, low-mumbled, more read from the lips than heard.

"She sounds," said Huston, "as if she was carvin' out her guts."

MacMaugh slowly shook his head.

"Ain't as bad as it sounds. She'll last the trip—in her way."

Huston did not make out what he said, but he did not ask to be told again.

"Nothin' to do," he stated dully.

Again MacMaugh slowly shook his head. The captain's voice came harsh and bitter through the smother of sound.

"You know what I say?" he grated with a sudden momentary flame of savagery. "I say she's a hog, a wallerin' hog!"

MacMaugh's eyes lifted, slow, hard, vacant through the greasy forelock shag, regarding Huston.

"She's what we made."

"Then we made a damned wallerin' hog," Huston answered as he turned away.

A sense of helplessness undermined him, so that he did not care whether he moved or stayed; one place was like another now, so long as he need stand no more. There was a greasy chair against a stanchion, where the second engineer usually rested, and Huston dropped into that.

About him the wheeling thick rhythm of sound, the groan and chuck of moving parts, the formless full note of rushing, imprisoned steam. A great whirling toil of giants, a vast soul-cracking labor without meaning, that must be carried through to the end.

From up forward in the maindeck bow rose a great ringing shout, a second, and a third; then a sudden tumult, a surging roar of voices, the bellowing cries of the roustabouts on the forward deck. MacMaugh lifted his head; Huston stirred. A black figure came catapulting back along the guards, in its head a gleaming flash of teeth. It danced, gesticulated wildly, pointing up river.

"D'*Betsy*, d'*Betsy!*" the negro shouted, "De gawallopin' *Betsy* 'e show!"

"What the devil are you talkin' about?" Huston demanded savagely. "What's broke loose up there?"

A tumble of unintelligible words came through the noise of the engines, and the figure was gone, racing forward again. The tube from the pilot-house whistled shrilly.

"Fool niggers see a steamboat," MacMaugh tossed over his shoulder as he turned to the tube. "Think they see the *Betsy*, that's all." Then to the tube, "Aye?"

From the megaphone in which the pilot's tube ended came the voice of Nate Lacrosse, contradicting MacMaugh.

"The *Grey* is in sight at a quarter of a mile!"

The eyes of Huston and MacMaugh met and locked in a long gaze. Huston broke the silence at last.

"She stuck herself on a bar some place," he said. "Ask Nate if she's clear."

"Is she aground?" MacMaugh shouted through the tube.

"Not now she ain't," came the voice.

Once more they looked at each other; presently their eyes fell away.

"If she's clear we'll lose her again," said Huston; and the engineer nodded, and spat.

But from the forecastle the joyful yells of the roustabouts continued, overlapping, rising in brief choruses, never still. A stench of scorched oil drifted back to them, telling them that the striker had of his own initiative ordered in resin. Periodically came the gruffer chorusing yells of the firemen as they fed the flames, coughing shouts in rhythm as they frantically stoked, racing to get the doors shut again, conserving the precious draft.

The continual clamor forward stirred the captain and the engineer in spite of themselves, tormenting them with the nagging ghosts of hopes that were dead. They remained in their places, grim, inert under the pall of their defeat. Fifteen minutes passed, while the new heat of the resin told its story in the increased tempo of the rhythms and the heavier churr of her paddle-wheels.

"We'll make Natchez in twenty hours for the run," said MacMaugh at last. "A good, clean effort for any man's boat. It's a good steamboat we've lost, between us."

"Yes," said Huston listlessly out of his fatigue. The anger in which he had cursed her was gone. "She's a good boat."

Forward, continually, those lifting yells, now and then breaking into the syncopated beat of songs:

> "Beat, man, dat steamin' steamboat—
> *Cross-cross-cross oba Jordan ribba!*
> Beat her now or blow to hallelujah—
> *One mo' ribba to cross!*"

Again the speaking tube whistle blew shrilly, cutting through the vortex of sound.

"Aye?"

"We're pullin' up hand over hand!" said Nate's voice.

For a moment Huston sat dazed, uncomprehending. Then he leaped to his feet.

"*What?*"

Lacrosse heard him above, through the tubes.

"We're gainin' hand over fist," he yelled down. "We'll take her inside the hour!"

A moment's dazed unbelief. Huston licked dry lips; then:

"Nate! It ain't her! How the hell can it be her!"

"It is her, I tell you!" came that distant voice through the tube. "Don't I know her by now?"

"You *sure?*"

"Hellamighty! Look fer yerself!"

Huston sprang for the guards, followed by the dazed eyes of MacMaugh who dared not leave his controls. He raced forward, fatigue forgotten.

Up the black river, less than a quarter of a mile away, shone the lights of the *Betsy Grey*. By the spacing of those far pinholes in the darkness, by the showers of sparks that perpetually erupted from her stacks, he knew that it was she. Her red starboard light, by some whim hung lower than the green light on her larboard stack, identified her past doubt.

Still dazed, he turned to the fireroom. Craig was there, grinning; it had been he who ordered in that oil. Craig and the engine striker who directed the firing were dancing grotesquely in each other's arms. The mate flung away from the striker to rush to Huston and exuberantly grip his hand.

"The *Grey* is feedin' resin!" Craig yelled. "Look at them sparks! It ain't doin' her no good! We can whip her hands down without resin or oil!"

"If she's layin' back—" Huston faltered.

"With resin on?" Craig shouted. "She can't *raise* no more steam than she's doin'! Look at the heat we got! Them stacks is damn close to red!"

"Are they watchin'—"

"Niggers with water buckets is on both upper decks, sousing the stacks when the color shows. Ain't nothin' will stop us now!"

An open barrel of whisky with a string of tin cups at its side stood on the forecastle forward of the fireroom. Between their spasms of frantic firing the firemen drank there at will. They threw open the doors now, six white-blazing maws that exhaled such a withering blast of heat as to force the white men bodily back.

In the sudden blaze of light the half-naked blacks worked frantically. They were picked men, great bullet-headed Congos with muscles like writhing snakes. The sweat poured over their faces, ran over the wet black skin of their torsos in rivulets that glinted in the blaze-light, molten silver and gold. A few moments of mad motion, like men fighting for their lives, while the ready-piled allotment of oil-soaked knots flung hissing into the inferno; then the clang of the iron doors, and an end to the eye-stinging glare.

The firemen turned stoop-shouldered away, shaking the sweat from their eyes, wide mouths gulping cooler air. Black faces, bleared with weariness, some of them, with rolling eyes; two or three lurched to the whisky barrel. Then the straining eyes of all of them peered forward through the rows of stanchions to the far lights of the *Grey*. No need of the whip here! They gave the best they had, now.

"Is this the best watch?" Huston asked, his eyes ablaze.

"The best o' both," said Craig. "Some come on ten hours ago. Lord, can't change now! Ain't a man in the line can be replaced with another as good. The whisky's holdin' 'em up; but they was ready for the whip when we raised the *Betsy's* lights!"

Huston paced to the bow, his eyes on the faltering *Grey*. A sudden complete silence had fallen in the gang of roustabouts gathered ahead. Then a swift jubilant negro voice:

"Ah kin heah it, heah plain! She's throwed a paddle-bucket—mebbe two!"

"G'long niggah, no man can't heah thataway!"

"Ah cain so! Dat *Betsy* chewin' herse'f up ev'y tu'n! She done fo' now!"

Again the freed rabble of jubilant

voices, bulging through with high, mellow whoops of negro laughter.

> "Beat, man, dat steamin' steamboat!
> *Cross-cross-cross oba Jordan ribba!*
> Beat her now or blow to hallelujah—
> *One mo' ribba to cross!*"

"Look," yelled Craig at his elbow, "look! She's closer! See how we've come up, just since you been here! God, Nate's steerin' a great race! She's done! We've got her! We've got her sure!"

Dancing, whooping, singing, heel-thumping negroes; jubilation, glory, victory come out of the grave! Flash came the blaze of the opening inferno doors.

A mad scream from the frantically working row of firemen before the furnace mouths, a scream of insane pain that clapped silence of ice over the singing negroes. It lifted the heads of the firemen from their work, made them falter and raise, and turned all eyes to the big black on Number Six. A reaching stab of flame had shot out of the firedoor from a bursting resin lump, driving flaming bits like burning shot into the eyes and face and throat of the man before. The hurt man reeled away from his furnace in an agony of pain and terror, caromed with driving skull from a stanchion, plunged toward the guards.

Craig was there already. He seized the big negro about the waist, struggling to hold him as he drove across the guards. A backward swung fist like a maul caught the mate in the temple, dropping him in a dazed huddle. The rail crashed and shuddered as the stricken fireman struck it; then the man plunged over into the black water that swirled past under the chocks. For a moment they glimpsed a bobbing bullet head that seemed fleeing suddenly astern, like a passed snag; then the paddles of the thirty-foot wheel struck it out of sight forever into the thrashed water below.

The engine striker's eyes were held only for a moment by the sudden touch of death; he whirled, thinking instantly and only of his fires, and those gaping unfed doors that let the cold air through, spoiling the underdraft that was the racing steamboat's breath of life. His furious yell rang through the silence that overlaid the droning song of the boat.

"Fire your doors! Fire your doors! You—" His command exploded into a wild splatter of oaths.

The row of firemen hesitated, looming grotesquely, black silhouettes bordered with wet flame. Two or three stooped uncertainly to their work. The engine striker sprang at the nearest black, striking with a pistol whose muzzle opened the side of the negro's face.

"Fire your doors!" A savage snarl. The fireman staggered, shielded his head with his arms; then, panic-stricken, caught between gun butt and furnace, the black swung gorilla-like with an arm like a great club, smashing the white man to the deck.

Craig was down, and the striker; the firemen drew together, their work forgotten. Half mad with whisky, with fatigue and heat, terrified by the flash of death that had cut away Number Six as with the stroke of a knife, dazed by the collapse of the white men that had gone down by their hands, they huddled together in the scorch of the white light, uncertain. In another moment they would have bolted, killing anything that stood in the way, leaping over the side—anything to be out of the crush of mad fear that had come upon them like the pressure of a mammoth down-cupped hand.

Then Huston was in front of them, coming up with measured stiff steps like a great ready dog, his teeth gleaming bare, his face and voice terrible. Yet his voice was somehow the same as when it had come lashing down from the hurricane, driving them hard in the routine of ordinary trips; harsher and colder and heavier than ever before, yet still drawling, measured, contemptuous—

"Fire your doors!"

His shirt-front was ripped open, where he had torn his pistol out. The white rolling eyes caught the gleam of it at his side. They moved to the doors, frantically stoked. Number One made a

break for the guards; the flame of Huston's pistol stabbed, and Number One flailed down, sliding in a heap over the boards.

"You, Martin! Fred! Take One and Six!"

A moment of silence without movement among the negroes that started from the bow; but he knew that they had heard, and disdained to turn. Then the two he had called took their places and worked with the rest.

Raggedly the doors closed at last, badly stoked. They needed more fuel than they had, yet he must leave a moment for the draft to take hold. "Stand to your doors! Now stay there!" Still the hard drawl in the harsh, coldly savage voice. "I'll kill the black that moves from his door!"

He turned his back on them, knowing he was master, knowing that they knew. He walked forward into the curve of the bow. The striker moaned, huddled where he had fallen. At the rail of the guards Tommy Craig, white-faced, was dragging himself doggedly to his feet. Huston had no eyes for them; he was seeking the lights of the *Betsy Grey*. At first his eyes found only the empty black of the river ahead. Then the laboring *Arnold Huston* cleared a wooded island, and the lights of the *Grey* rose up, near, near, nearer than he had dared to hope. Good God, how she had gained! Hand over hand, up, and up, and up—it seemed that he could see the *Huston* gain in the moments that he watched. The battle song of his fighting engines surged up through his body in a great tide.

Like a man possessed he whirled and shouted from where he stood. The hard voice rang over the surface of the river, through the stripped aisles of his boat. They said afterward that they heard him aboard the faltering *Betsy Grey*.

"*Fire your doors! Now stoke, you black devils, stoke!*"

Six furnace mouths blazed open as one; for an instant the frantic silhouettes flickered before the ports of white light. Then—

The boilers let go with a blast like the splitting apart of a world, leaving a great sky-gaping pit open to heaven where the forward cabin had been, a pit from which rolled a vast unfolding cloud of steam. Over the empty steam the pilot-house tottered hesitating, a weakened tower. Before the furnaces shone a great moiling bed of scattered coals, where the firemen had stood. A shuddering scream ended in a deep-chested sob and choked. Then silence, deep, solid, unbroken by the thrum of engines, purl of water, or murmur of the boat. In the deathly stillness the steam rolled over the surface of the river in vast billowing forms. Somewhere underneath the mask of the steam the wreckage of the *Arnold Huston* began to turn slowly to soft sheathing flame.

For a moment after the explosion Huston stood, stunned with shock, but upright still. Then—

"Jacqueline!"

The name rushed through his mind, burst from his lips. The peeling steam folded over him, and he strangled. He took two blind strides directly into the heart of the steam, toward the place where the stair had been; then crashed forward on to his face.

XXXII

THE MILE-WIDE coffee-colored flood of the Mississippi, mighty in its high water stages, rushed perpetually toward the sea, taking its broad bends with a strong swing and pull. The turgid current gnawed and fretted, its eddying mass of water powerful enough to pull under a horse or a man, or swing a great steamboat smashing against the bank. Spring was coming into the ancient river to make it young again, as it does every year, as it had done for ten thousand years before the steamboat came.

Under ninety feet of moving water, sinking deep into the muck of the bottom, lay the engines that had been the pride and the labor of MacMaugh. They were not alone; for twelve hundred miles the rushing tawny waters hid the iron hearts of other ships, rusting in the graveyard of

the muck. The charred, broken timbers of the steamboats went down the river to the final oblivion of the sea, among them the bits of wood that had carried Huston's name.

Arnold Huston was conscious of none of that, nor of where or who he was. Over him rolled vast illusory masses of steam, blinding him, strangling his tortured lungs. Through the steam he struggled endlessly, calling Jacqueline's name. Sometimes phantom shapes moved grotesquely about him in the fog of steam, among them one with a death's-head face.

Sometimes it was day, sometimes it was night; he could recognize that, though the steam was always there, its endless masses rolling over him like clouds of living pain. They had bound him down, but he fought the bonds, shouting deliriously, cursing the phantom shapes. When he lapsed into unconsciousness, borne down by pain, it was only to wake fighting, struggling against his bonds and the formless steam.

It could not last forever; a man must either live or die.

THE ROOM in which Jacqueline received Mark Wallace was large, high-ceilinged, but poorly and skimpily furnished. It was the house of a man whose ambitions had struck high, but whose fortunes had fallen short of them; so that he had been forced to retreat from plans begun, leaving unfinished works to decay in order that others might be saved. Horsehair furniture ranged scatteringly along the walls, maintaining a meager austerity; the worn hooked rugs on the floor were too small for their work, the salvage of a smaller house.

Beyond the windows the plantation lay, wooded here and there with cottonwoods half-grown. A score of figures moved erratically on the distant levee, here and there among them a team of mules. The people of the plantation were making their semi-annual fight against the voracious river.

And above, in a four-poster bed with a frayed white counterpane, Huston lay asleep, exhausted by his delirium and his brief, wretched struggles against his bonds.

The pallor of Jacqueline DuMoyne's thin face had increased almost to translucency; violet smudges underlay her eyes, softening their dark contrast. But she was steady and calm, her hands quiet at her sides. It was characteristic of her that she, almost alone among the women of her day and class, could stand with quiet hands, fidgeting with nothing. She appeared to Wallace more delicate, more fragile than before, and hence more precious, more difficult to lose. It was an ominous humiliation to him that he should find her here, yet he was glad to find her at all.

As for Mark Wallace, he was haggard; though this was partly concealed by his perfect grooming. There was, too, an unnatural brightness in his eyes, and his cheeks showed spots of color—perhaps from his ride. As Jacqueline appeared he snapped his quirt once against his boots, then flung it to the floor. He strode straight across to her, his hands extended to take hers. She permitted this, while remaining relaxed, apathetic almost. He thought that her breathing quickened a trifle; but he could be sure only that veils seemed to draw behind her eyes, so that he could read nothing.

"Jacqueline, Jacqueline, in God's name where have you been?"

Her eyes for an instant shifted from his, her lips moved as if to form an evasion. Then she looked at him again, and gave him a deeper answer than he had asked.

"Where I always intend to be, Mark."

He brushed past that without probing.

"How's Huston?"

"He has a chance."

"Then he'll live. The man is half alligator. He's lost everything for us, of course. When he saw the *Betsy Grey* was crippled he had only to cut steam down to safety and slide past, winner. But what did he do? Crowd steam all the more, blow the boat into eternity, lose everything, just as he had everything won! He—"

She cut through his nervously racing words.

"Where is—" She hesitated.

"DuMoyne? Dead."

There was a pause, in which she drew away her hands. Then Jacqueline said in a flat voice—

"God rest his soul."

"I doubt it."

She shot him a look darkly unreadable. Her eyes appeared to blur as if she were about to weep; but they were clear again the next moment. Then—

"Does any one know?"

"Everybody knows. But it is thought that he was killed in a quarrel with his confederates."

"Confederates?"

"The facts are out now," Wallace explained with a disinterested impatience. "He's been engaged in smuggling, as I suspected in the beginning."

"In the beginning? In the beginning, and always, until a little while ago, you said that you believed him killed in that first duel."

He jerked his fingers in an impatient gesture.

"We have other things to think of now."

"Of course."

"You must get your things together."

He spoke gently, as if he were carefully threading his way; yet with the perfect assurance of a man who bases his plans on firm-grounded assumptions.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll find a carriage. We've got to get out of this."

She drew away.

"I'm not leaving, Mark."

Mark Wallace started to speak, checked, then said evenly—

"This has gone far enough, Jacqueline."

"I'll be the judge of that."

He scanned her face, but found there no wavering hint of flexibility. That his case was all but hopeless he must have known before he came there, for he was a thinking man. Even so, as he now found himself balked, resourceless, the dark blood flowed up into his face and he was forced to turn away to compose himself. He stood with his face averted from her, looking out through the window across the fields, across the black broken muck to those scattered, hurrying groups that fought the river. There was a steamboat there now that brought sacks, and sand on a barge; its superstructure thrust up oddly above the levee, its hull many feet above the levee-guarded cotton land below.

When he turned to her again the dark flush was gone. Much of the haggardness seemed to have disappeared also, and the harsh lines of weariness were blurred out by a returning light within. His face was beautiful again, as she had seen it when she had first known him—delicately strong, sensitive, so quickly perceptive of beauty that it seemed itself to reflect the beauty that he saw.

"You are tired," he said softly. "Sit here."

She remained standing.

"I must go back to Arnold in a minute."

He hesitated a little longer, his eyes unseeing upon the quirt he had flung down. He seemed to be carefully gathering himself, choosing his words. He smiled a little as he looked up, and his words came gently, slowly, the picked words of a thinker, an actor, a lover of beauty, a man who was putting everything he had into a supreme effort. In his own way Mark Wallace was making a game final struggle for victory against odds that had turned overwhelmingly against him.

"Look at those gray clouds out there," he said, "full of rain, always more rain. The river's up, up, higher than its been for years. A dozen towns are under water; all up and down the river they're fighting for their homes, just as they are out there. And still it rains. One vast swamp, that's what this country is, built on wet, reeking muck. The black damp creeps up the walls in New Orleans, into the houses, into the people themselves. It's all one bog, a nightmare of a country."

He paused a moment, changed pace, and went on:

"It isn't all like this; there are other countries where it's beautiful, and the air is clean. Sunshine, sand beaches, wind from the mountain tops. Hills that rise from the sea. Towns that build up and up those hills, full of a kind of life that these fever-struck bogs can't ever know. I've had enough of this country. Haven't you?"

He stopped, and for a few moments looked out the window again. As she was about to speak he turned suddenly and came directly to her.

"Dear heart, come with me! Let's leave this damned swamp country; go together to some far away place where we can find the beauty of life again—Paris, Florence, Madrid—some place where life is, where we can put all this behind us forever! We can be married today, and take ship tomorrow. We can—"

He was pleading with her now, gesturing with tense, outstretched hands. He had tried to take her in his arms, but she had drawn back, so that he stood still now, approaching her no more. His words rushed out, tumbling over each other.

"There's no tie in the world to keep us here any longer. I've loved you as no man has ever loved a woman. Four years of my life have been yours—guardian of your interests—"

"Self-appointed." Her voice cut in, low, but very clear. He was checked for an instant, and she struck in, "Why did you deceive me about my husband? Why did you lie to me, telling me he was dead when you knew he was alive?"

"Lie? Why, Jacqueline—"

"You said only a moment ago—"

"What does it matter, now that he's dead?"

"It was you," she said, "that arranged his death, and accomplished it."

"You know as well as I," he reminded her, amazed at her illogic, "that in this last duel I only removed a menace to you."

"This last duel?" she asked suddenly. "What—"

He interrupted here.

"Have you forgotten the fear, the horror, with which you confronted him, with his ghastly destroyed face?"

The tears had suddenly appeared in her eyes, and her hands twisted themselves together. She murmured:

"I can't forget—can't ever forget—that once he was beautiful, and strong. That terrible disfiguring duel— Before that—" Her voice trailed off.

A sort of velvety hardness came into Wallace's eyes, making him look unfamiliar.

"I think your memory fails you. As I recall, before that first duel he had already become distinctly intolerable."

She blazed at him:

"Who is to be the judge of that? There are things one is willing to forget."

"So I perceive."

A silence fell between them, which Mark Wallace presently broke.

"Jacqueline, what is it that's standing between us? Can it be that—"

"More than you would believe," she answered. "Things that can never be crossed over."

"Do you mean that you can't—"

"It's impossible, what you propose," she told him. "Impossible!"

Such a black fury welled up into Mark Wallace's face as she would not have believed possible there. His skin purpled, and the veins swelled in his forehead until they caught the angled light in shadowed sculpture. Her eyes widened, and she started back, shocked by the contorting savagery of his passion. She half expected his hands to rush at her throat. But when his anger found expression it was in words again, lashing words that sought to cut and hurt.

"You empty wench, you flitter-brained, ungrateful fool! You as good as set me on your worthless scum of a husband in the first place! It was you that turned Arn Huston on me; you came to me to defend you from your precious DuMoyne when he came back with his face off, and now you stand there sniveling over him because I've finished the work I began for you! You—"

She cried out—

"Finished the work you began!"

"I fought him with knives in a dark room, way back in the beginning, I sunk my blade in the bones of him. Liked the effect, didn't you? And now that I've killed him with pistols at five paces, you pretend you suspected nothing of the first duel. Who did you think was this Fouchet that no one ever heard of? Who were the authorities with whom he left word of what he had done? Why should I have been the only one who knew everything about it to the last detail?

"Twice I've risked my life for you under circumstances few men could face. And now you, like any shameless quadroon, slink away with my closest enemy; and when I've forgiven that—"

The fury ebbed out of him, leaving him white and quivering, without strength. He turned away, sickened by his own emotion. In the silence that followed he could barely hear her voice, low and full of horror, saying over and over—

"Beast—beast—beast—"

IT COULD not last forever; a man must either live or die.

At the end of untold ages, the steam rifted, thinned, and was finally gone. The phantom shapes dimmed, and Huston no longer saw the death's-head face. He ceased to struggle. It seemed the river was under him again, its current majestic, perpetual, unhurried, taking its bends with a strong swing and pull. Still river, silent and smooth, bending its way to the sea.

He lay still, no longer wasting his strength, holding tenuously to the thin thread of his life with the grip of the damned.

At last he opened his eyes, and found that he could see clearly again—sunlight, the post of a bed, the ceiling of the room in which he lay. Then he saw her face, pale, as delicately contoured as that of a child, framed in her dark hair, with faintly slanted eyes as dark as if they were brushed on with ink. No, not brushed on, for they were deep and melting, and smiled into his.

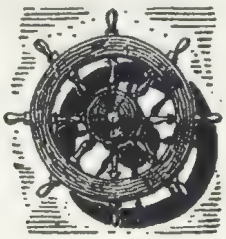
Suddenly he said in a husky whisper:

"Where's my clothes? I've got work to do."

She answered—

"Soon."

Still river, bending its way with a strong swing and pull; gentle hands and lace—



THE END

A sawyer and a lynx of the lumber camps

NOVEMBER

By

A. R. Garrett

"YOW-OW-OU-YOU!" goes the insatiable band of hook-toothed steel on its hungry way through the green timber. "Yow-ow-ou-you! More logs! More logs!" is the song of the steel serpent as it lashes its silver tail through the knotty grains of curly birch. And the man who knows the song, whose heart more than his ears has heard the saw grind out a row of teeth against a hidden spike and go fuming on until it is checked, knows that the whirring, screeching thing is as merciless as it is hungry and can tear at his own being as well as a log. He knows the band-saw can burn a welt across his consciousness as it can across a clogged steel guide of the band-mill. And some time he will know he is bondslave to the song.

A young man, new to the game of logs and life, laughs at the thought. He does not yet know the song. If the malevolence of the saw touches him he forgets the bite of the teeth, finding the flat of the tempered band warm and smooth, like a woman's skin. But if he remains a while under the siren spell of that monster, he will never forget, but take his due from the mill when his time comes. The band-saw is made to rip and tear through logs, gnawing with sawdust-slavering teeth the flesh of oak or birch sticks. The fact that it rips and tears through the souls of the men who tend its gluttonous feasts does not deter it from its purpose.

"Logs! More logs! Yow-ow-ou-you!" is the song of the swaged teeth as they spill the sawdust from the slit behind them and the mettle from the spirits of the mill men.

NOVEMBER JOE SHESSEL knew the song. He was a sawyer and a good one. He had an eye like an osprey. At the very instant the loader kicked the

log on to the carriage, his first glance at the pond-wet log, Joe could tell where the knots were and how best to break down the log. His ear knew the exact minute a saw should come off to be replaced by one fresh from the filer's swage and file. He knew every whim of the band-saw; knew her speed, her tension, the sawdust capacity of her gullets. But there was one point Joe Shessel had not yet fully realized—the poignant fact that he was her vassal, subject to her every fancy.

"I'm going to quit," he would say. "I'm sick of this sweat on my back and sawdust down my throat. I'm going to Duluth to my cousin's and maybe ship out on an ore boat, or work in the steel mills. I can stick it out here for another month or so—about November I'll be gone." He had been saying that sort of thing for ten years now, it was spring for the ore boat and fall for the steel mills, and he was still here. "I'll stick it out till November."

"November" Joe Shessel.

It might have been his racking inability to figure out why he could not quit the sawmill that made his heart give bitter words to his tongue. He would eye the butt of the oncoming log with an intensity that spoke of nothing but love for the sound and sight of the lacerating cuts of the saw, and then defile every living and inanimate thing that had caused the log and himself to meet. He would curse everything about the mill from the superintendent down to the truckers. Money did not sooth the turmoil within him. He was getting more money now than any other hardwood sawyer in Wisconsin, and rather than see him quit, Baxter, the superintendent, would have paid him more. No, it was the tearing at his vitals by the forty-four-foot steel slave-master. November Joe knew the song of it, but not the subtlety.

They were sawing hard maple that day—sugar, as mill men know it—and out of a clear sky the carriage offset stuck. The saw had sheared off her second slice of the log and was jigging back, running free to start the next cut. The automatic offset should have shunted the carriage over to slide by the saw, but it didn't, and the thinnest edge of the flitched log caught the back of the saw and things began to happen.

November Joe showed his headiness. He foresaw the impending collision a split-second before the log rammed into the saw, but he couldn't jerk his lever to stop the carriage quick enough. When the thing did stop with a stuttering jolt, the fourteen-inch whizzing ribbon of steel was leaving the upper wheel to crash through the wooden housing around it.

Hell itself was loose then. With the upper half free from the harness, that live steel eel of a band-saw bore down into the iron and timber of the carriage and ripped off a twelve-foot strip of flying teeth. The band-saw snapped completely in two and recoiling, flung the carriage, log and the awe-struck head dogger against the west wall of the mill; it lashed the length of the floor with the ferocity of a whip held in the outraged hand of an ogre.

It was no longer a band saw, held in check by wheels and guides, but a live steel lightning-bolt thrashing in the bark chips and sawdust. Pete Hardwick, the mill foreman, was an old campaigner, but the look on his face when one of the carriage-head blocks crushed the swamper, Paul Drewlin, would have turned a buccaneer white.

November Joe Shessel had jumped back across the edger table, escaping the flying saw-teeth under a shower of the planks from the band-wheel housing. He lay there stunned while the saw wrecked its havoc. And when it finally quieted down—the scant two minutes of the cyclone had seemed twenty—somebody lifted the boards from Joe's head and let him look around at the damage. They were carrying Drewlin away. The saw lay folded and twisted like a huge mass of burned butterscotch, silent, very still. The superintendent had arrived to look things over.

"We'll have her going for the night

crew, Carson—that was a good saw to hold up as good as she did. Drewlin's dead. You're not hurt, Joe? Good boy. Go home and rest up for the day."

November Joe eyed him with a cold and fishy squint from a habitually cocked head. His upper lip curled.

"And tomorrow and the next day. I'm through, Baxter. I ain't goin' t' play nursemaid to the fire-eater of a saw for nobody or nothin'!"

"What? That scare you? Saws have broke loose before—"

"And they will again and I won't be under the next one. No, sir—I'm through this time. Got a ginseng bed over at my place that'll make my livin' or maybe I'll hie-tail for Duluth or St. Paul."

"That's too bad, Joe—we like you. You're the best sawyer I know of. Would twenty-five dollars a month more interest you?"

"I'd smoke it in my pipe, Baxter. I'll get my time—"

"Now be reasonable, Joe. What do you say to handling a resaw for a while, or I'll make you foreman of the sorting table. After a while you'll get over this experience and you'll want to get back to this saw."

"Sorting table! You're crazy. Workin' with that pack of hunyaks! You think I'm scared of this job? Was I scared that time the high speed planer threw one of her knives and clipped off them three fingers? Went back to work on her, didn't I? No, sir—I been tryin' to quit for ten years now and you can't stop me. I'll get my time in the mornin'."

"You'll be back, Joe. Well, I'll say this: You can have the sawyer's job on this mill whenever you get ready."

With the mill so silent, the assorting table workers below idle, November Joe felt strangely inconsequential. He had nothing to do and lots of time to do it in. He sauntered past the sawdust burner and the tool-house, halting to gaze back at the big, quiet hulk of the mill, half wondering if he hadn't been too quick about quitting. There was the sorting chain. Rats! He wouldn't boss that hunkie bunch—the poor devils, snaking the squared timbers from an endless string of droppings from the trimmers above.

Ten hours a day of that stuff, sweating, freezing in the raw winds of spring when the sawing slowed up. Ten hours of poking a cant-hook at three-hundred-pound sticks and hauling them off the moving chain to the trucks behind. Like horses dragging plows over a stump field!

No, sir, he'd loaf first and sell his ginseng roots. And he wouldn't be back either, like Baxter said—not this time. They could keep asking him till hell froze over! November Joe could be a man of great decision and firmness when the band-saw was not singing its song of triumph.

THE WHITE river plunged by him as he took the woods trail to the old saw camp. Once he stopped, his eyes following the uncertain course of a poplar branch down the river, now pulled down by the undertow, now riding high on the white, curly waters; always he was propelled toward the mill against better judgment. Well, he had shaken the mill now. He kicked a moss-grown log into the currents to show his disregard for their vain urging.

The fact that he was walking alone this time made Joe think of Fred Latout. Poor old Fred and his Chippewa squaw and those two rat-eyed kids. One of these days a bed piece would slip out from under a stacked pile of green ties and those kids would grow up with the Indians. They had little enough chance as it was, without Latout dying. Fred did his best with them. Fred was all right.

A spruce fan struck him in the face to bring his thoughts back to himself. Well, there were thirty pounds of ginseng ready to sell, all dried and sorted, and it ought to bring seven dollars a pound at St. Paul. Almost a month's pay and no work to it—only five years' wait. And he was away from that infernal screeching of the saw and the endless cussing of Pete Hardwick, the mill foreman, and Baxter's "soft soap." November Joe lifted his ear to

catch any sound from the mill. Then he kicked another stick over the rocky ledge when he realized the roar of the water would drown out any other sound.

A red squirrel chuckled at him on its flight up a Norway. A pelican curved down from some lofty nest and rode the eddies of the stream, filling his pouch so full he could not rise. Joe laughed. Like some of the gluts at the mill boarding-house! Here was a low spot where a gravel spit stretched some feet out into a smoother length of the river. The trail broke and Joe clambered up a boot-bitten incline and brushed through half a mile of massed tamarack.

Beyond that was the clearing of the deserted woods camp, the settling dusk giving it the semblance of a ruined war village. The jagged framework beyond the rubbish pile was the ruins of the cook-house, piece by piece having gone into the box stoves of Latout and Joe Shessel. There was a curious odor about the place, coming from the farther knot of second growth birch which screened Latout's cabin. Minnie Latout followed her congenital desire to trap and found it more profitable than raising French breed children.

November Joe's own unpainted board shack was drawn back under the overhanging spruces like a root cellar in a mound. Its immediate yard was a litter of lard cans and boxing strips. To the left was an unused horse barn with its scattering of weather-yellowed hay. The key turned in the padlock; Joe pushed into the shack, tossing his lunch-box to a shelf over the wood-box.

Under the yellow flare of the bracket lantern the single room appeared as unkempt as the yard. Hardly any object could be distinguished clearly in the profuse accumulation of boxes and tins, heaps of old clothes, papers and magazines. Even the shape that moved was diffused—a tawny form rising from some burlap sacks to sway forward specter-like.

Joe spread his legs, hands on hips, head bent forward in a sturdy attitude of waiting. The lithe form padded closer, rump and tail gracefully swaying. Long pencils of stiff black hair rising from the tip of each ear marked it for a full-grown Canadian lynx. Joe nodded jerkily.

"Alice, old girl—you glad to see Joe? Tired of being cooped up all day? Nice girl. Hungry?"

With a clumsy gentleness, he smoothed the sleek pepper-and-salt fur of the animal's head back of the two gleaming green eyes. The lynx circled his legs, rubbing the full length of her body against them. Sniffing continuously, she paced back to her burlap bed, returning to drag her forefoot over Joe's boot.

"Hungry, huh? All right, girl, I'll fix you up. Ladies first."

He opened a rough board cupboard and took down a pound tea-can, the bottom covered with a black sticky mass, wet tea-leaves to which had been added salt and sugar. Joe dumped the stringy contents on a dirty plate, throwing the empty can into the wood-box. Alice was tense with excitement, licking her long side whiskers, and when the plate came to the floor she thrust her head forward, her nose into the little black pile of tea-leaves, sniffing sensually, finally taking some between her teeth.

With the feast ended and Alice curled up on the pile of burlap, her eyes dull and drowsy, November Joe fried potatoes and bacon, splitting open a can of corn with the hand-ax. Afterward he sat in the doorway smoking his pipe tranquilly. The stars were like a million lighted candles above the thick banks of spruce and hemlock and tamarack. A Robinson's owl hooted from somewhere along the river and marked its approach by repeated calls. Then it fluttered into the trees over Joe's head, waiting for him to go inside that it might plunder the rubbish piles.

From the east the light puffs of wind brought the sounds from the mill. They had the head-saw going again—there she was, a hushed rumble at first, a sort of crooning, then the prolonged screeching and the succeeding escape of steam. All night she would rip through those logs,

exacting everything from the men who tended her repasts.

The owl whirred out of the spruce at a man's scuffling in the clearing. In the rectangle of light from the doorway his figure became a little bony man with long arms. The skin of his face was parchment and stretched tightly over the protruding bones. His eyes bulged. His speech disclosed his Old Country French origin; it was not the vernacular of the French-Canadian.

"It was an accident at the mill, Joe?"

"Accident? Tell the world it was an accident! That saw sure raised one hell of a fuss for a while. All because this outfit's too cheap to replace that heap of junk with a new carriage. Why, the offset stuck and let the log jam into the saw—knocked her off the wheel. I wish to hell Baxter had been there by the saw with me. It'd scared the infernal tightness out of him, the dotty old skunk!"

"Lucky thing for you you are not killed. My good friend Paul Drewlin is dead? Who is next? I am glad Fred Latout works in a safe place like the drying yard. You quit, no?"

"Yep. I'm through this time, Latout. Sick of every thing around that mill. I told Baxter I was through."

"But he does not believe you?"

"No—the lunkhead! He's figuring I'll be back. I'll fool him. Going to take it easy for a while and then light out for St. Paul."

As if the night breeze heard him and cared to challenge his words, it sent through the curtain of spruce to the east the muffled cry of the band-saw—the shrill call of a trap-hurt wolf. Joe could see Leo Forny, the night sawyer, standing rigidly there by the levers, signaling the deck scaler, loading the log, smacking the nigger against the bark to set the log on the carriage, starting it toward the saw. He could feel the mill floor tremble as the whishing teeth tore into the green maple butt.

"To hell with you! No, not you, Fred. Let's go inside. Too many mosquitoes out here."

Latout stood for a while by the stove, eyeing the curved body of the lynx. Her head was erect, extended, distrust in both her eyes and Latout's as they met. Joe stuffed tobacco into his pipe.

"You two never will get on, will you?"

The Frenchman spread out his hands in a characteristic gesture of futility.

"I'm afraid no, my friend Joe. I do not like the color of her eye. It is not healthy. All the time she is too quiet, I think, like the calm before the storm, perhaps. And you have made her a slave to the tea. She is your puppet now when she has had her fill, but some day I think she will turn on you, Joe."

Shessel shook his head, pushing a chair toward Latout, himself sitting on the blankets of the bunk.

"Them cats are cowards—got no more guts than a rabbit. I'll admit they's fourteen devils in them eyes of hers and a pile o' power in her claws. She tore that Indian dog of Ben Letz's to pieces last winter. But she wouldn't set on to a man—especially me. But anyhow I always keep an extra can of tea handy so's not to take any chances. It always satisfies her."

Latout was drawing the edge of his shoe along a crack in the floor. He did not seem conversational.

"Funny thing how that habit of hers started. You remember when I found her in that fox set that time two years ago. She was a little, soft baby of a thing—cute little devil—like a ball of yarn. At first she wouldn't do nothing but sulk around; wouldn't eat—lonesome for her ma I guess. Then one day while I was down to the mill she got hungry and got up on that shelf and into a can of tea. Ate pretty near all of it and was sound asleep when I got home.

"I kept on feedin' it to her and after a while I got wise to the fact that she couldn't get along without it. She'd scratch around me until I give it to her. The leaves'd stick to her mouth so I got to wettin' it down with water and put some salt and sugar in it to make it taste better. For over a year now she's been

puttin' away a pound a week—got the habit pretty bad. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I refused to feed it to her. She'd make a fuss all right. But she's afraid of me."

Latout looked up suddenly.

"She fool you, m'sieur. My Minnie she is afraid of the bob-cat. She says, 'Latout, I am Cree. I know the sign of evil in the eye of the lynx. Some day it will kill little Lenore or André.' You know, Joe, my friend, if that happened, I would kill the bob-cat."

November Joe Shessel stopped swinging his foot.

"Forget it. You won't never have to kill her. I keep her locked up, don't I? How's she goin' to get at your kids?"

Perhaps that swinging foot had been fascinating the lynx, for when it ceased its motion she stirred to her feet and came out from under the bunk, scraping her back against the sideboard. She swung across the room with carefully placed padded steps and circled back to her master. She entirely ignored Latout, sniffing at Joe's legs, a glint in her eye that he could not mistake. Joe scowled at her.

"What's the matter with you? Didn't you get enough tea? It wasn't two hours ago I fed you. Go lie down."

Paying no attention to the command, Alice curved around his legs, rubbing her blackish head against his yellow shoes. Fred Latout slapped his knee nervously.

"You see. She wants more and more all the time. That is the way it works. I think is is better you give her the tea."

Joe worked a tasseled ear between his fingers, thinking it might be affection the lynx wanted. But no grateful licking of his hand occurred, Alice dragging her paw over his shoe. By way of reassurance, Joe looked to the can of tea on the cupboard shelf.

"No hurry. I ain't goin' to feed her every hour to keep her satisfied. She'll have to wait."

The band-saw whined again in a dismal wail. November Joe leaned back, twisting his head to listen. They had a fresh saw on now and were in hemlock, by the soft sound of the cutting. There was the rush of steam as the carriage jigged back. Alice had held her eyes up on her master all the while, saw his apparent indifference to her pleading. To bring him back to her desire, she lifted her big forefoot and brought the claws down the length of the hanging leg.

She succeeded in her attempt to alarm. Latout cried out the second she struck and Joe came forward with an amazed start, saw the Frenchman's eyes bulging even before he felt any pain. He looked down to see his pants below the knee hanging in strips and blood oozing from the scratches. Alice sat on her haunches, unaware that her innocent gesture of impatience had been interpreted as malicious.

"You would, would you!"

Joe's heavy shoe struck her jaw and she dropped low, recoiling, sudden fire filling her green eyes. She knew she would have to fight for her desire now.

"The tea, Joe—give her the tea!" Latout was exclaiming under his breath.

"Tea! I'm going to give her hell! That's the kind of tea that cat'll get—a lickin'. You green-eyed devil, I'll teach you to swipe me like that!"

"*Sacre bleu!* She will kill you!"

November Joe snatched up the heavy birch chair that the Frenchman had quitted and crept toward the slinking form of the cat. Her shoulder muscles bulged as she put her weight first on one leg and then the other, rump pushing an empty pail before it. The brandished chair and the threatening approach of the man who was her master forced her into the corner by the wood-box. When she could go no farther she pressed herself to the floor and waited. The chair came down with a dull thud.

Half in fear, half with a mounting anger, the lynx blinked her eyes and took the blow. The impact of the chair on her head did not hurt her, but she was enraged beyond the point of caution. This man had been her friend, had given her the bitter stuff from the shiny can for

which her whole body was crying now. Yet now he refused to feed her, desiring rather to fight. If such was the case she was ready.

When the chair rose again Alice twisted her head and tensed herself against the wall. The instant it began its descent, she flicked her ears and sprang at the object that was trying to subdue her. The chair was flung out of Joe's clenched hands like something alive. The thirty-eight pound body of the lynx struck him flatly and he lurched against the hot edge of the stove. He drew back, shielding his eyes with bent arms.

"You pop-eyed fool!" he was crying at Latout. "Don't stand there like a dummy! Can't you see she's gone wild? Get the tea in the cupboard there!"

The lynx had drawn herself into the corner again, crouching to leap once more, watching with stark eyes Joe's motion of getting behind the table. He dared to take his own eyes from her to Latout's fumbling in the cupboard. He saw the frightened Frenchman take down the can and pull off the cover. The color faded from his face.

"Empty! It's the wrong one—what the—"

"*Nom de Dieu,* there is no more here! It is the only can of tea!"

With a sudden remembrance, Joe's composure seemed to return to him. He straightened a little, and for fully a minute watched the two buttons of green flicker at him from the corner, watching the tensed muscles being held in leash by some animal reason which prompted Alice to give her assailant a chance to procure the bitter stuff she desired before she eliminated all chance of his doing so.

"Shoot her, *mon ami—coûte qu'il coûte!*"

"No, I won't shoot her. I remember now about that tea. I used it all up, thinking I had another can. Kidded myself into thinking I was a full one ahead. Listen, Latout. Make a break for your place and bring some tea. Run like hell, man! I'll take care of Alice."

Latout waited no longer than to mark a line to the door, flying across the room before the crouched figure of the lynx. The door thudded shut. In the yard he hesitated, half reluctant to leave Joe alone within. But he shrugged his shoulders by way of reassurance and broke across the moonlit clearing.

He was gone perhaps ten minutes. During that time Joe, by warily distracting the lynx' attention, had managed to keep it at a safe distance; and now, as Latout entered, he saw that Joe and the animal had changed positions, Joe backed up against the bunk, the lynx crawling toward him in the center of the floor. Her tail was switching ominously when Latout shut the door, and at first she paid no attention, kept her eyes riveted on Joe.

Then her nostrils widened and she dropped her rump to swing around, driving Latout into a panic. She flashed up at the hand which held the can of tea. Latout, his eyes bulging frantically, attempted to sidestep, but the lynx twisted in her leap and the full force of her hurtling, yellow-gray body struck his face. A claw came down across his forehead and he went down with a cry of pain. He covered himself with his arms, expecting to be torn to shreds.

But Alice did not want flesh, as inherent as her desire for it might have been. She flattened the can of tea with one blow of her forefoot. The cover clattered off and she buried her nose in the contents, filling her nostrils with short, half-drawn sniffs. Her curling tongue licked gray whiskers and her haunches scraped along the floor as she settled into relaxation. Loud smacks testified to the appeasement of her hungering.

Fred Latout was the first to acknowledge the denouement of the incident. He stumbled toward the bunk. The more intimate sight of the blood on his face brought November Joe out of the amazed lethargy that had come upon him following Alice's leap. He thrust a pillow beneath his friend's head.

"She got you, Latout, and I'm going to kill her!"

He spoke the words in a determined monotone. Latout raised a restraining hand.

"No, my friend, Joe. No. It is—all right."

A sound, quite anomalous to this situation, came tauntingly out of the east.

"Yow-ow-ou-you!"

It had a hollow, droning tone and seemed to mock the plight of the man who had allowed his friend to be clawed by a frenzied pet. Joe bit his lip and wet a cloth in the water pail to bathe Latout's face. He cleansed the wounds with iodine and fashioned a bandage from a yellow shirt.

"I'll kill her now, Latout. She won't—"

Joe had half turned toward the placid figure of the lynx. She had consumed the entire pound of the black leaves and lay quite still, her head upon the floor. Shessel stepped to her quickly, the toe of his shoe touching her ribs. There was no movement of response. His hand felt no heart beat.

"She's dead."

Latout answered with scarcely a muscle moving.

"Yes. I was afraid. The tea—she ate it all? There was too much. She should not eat it all. The tea—"

"You poisoned her, Latout."

"The heart—it stopped beating. There was too much tea. Perhaps, Joe, my friend, I was thinking of little André and Lenore when I put the water on the tea. But there was too much."

November Joe's foot lightly touched the body of the lynx again and kicked the tea can aside savagely. Outside the midnight stillness brought the song of the band-saw just beyond the black tracery of the trees. Joe strode about the yard, hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, assailed by a mental anguish that he could not grasp.

"Yow-ow-ou-you!"

There was Leo Forny jerking the lever when the shotgun valve stuck, steadying it when the carriage leaped away again. Damn that tricky old carriage! Tricky old life. Knocked head over appetite this afternoon by a crazy band-saw that he hated and hadn't even been scratched—and then come home to have his friend Latout clawed to pieces by a wildcat who he thought was his pet.

No use trying to figure it out. Maybe the saw was more a friend of his than he thought. He hated it but it stood by him just the same, which was more than Alice had done. Well, she was dead, but the saw was still alive. Listen to that.

"Yow-ow-ou-you!"

Joe looked through the square of yellow light in the window. Fred Latout was sitting up on the edge of the bunk, swinging his legs almost imperceptibly, his bandaged head bent low.

"Can't blame him for killin' her," Joe said to himself. "Tonight showed she might have caused some trouble. Wonder if Baxter 'd take me back like he said? Say, he'll get a laugh—the lunkhead. 'You'll be back,' he says. He's a wise old fool at that. You-ow-ou-you! Shut up! That ginseng can dry up to dust for all I care. I'll go back to sawin'—work along till November anyhow."

Of Ling Pei the bandit and the sixty-two year old infant

THE PURPLE MONKEY

By Carroll K. Michener

UNCLE NNG amused himself with his rubber catapult. He was rarely without some such toy. Yesterday it was a kite shaped like a carp, and the expedition had been obliged to pause for half an hour so that he might not miss the advantage of a propitious wind. He flew his paper bauble with the zest of a boy, and yet with the superb dignity of a mandarin engrossed in an affair of state.

Now it was this bean-shooter, a strip of tubing from a bicycle tire stretched across the fork of a willow twig.

Thwack! sounded the catapult, and a howl of imprecation rose from a recumbent coolie, who awoke perplexed, on the apex of a snore, clutching at a point of pain on his sinewy right ham.

Thwack! again, and there was a cry of devils from the cook, in whose hands a thin tea bowl had mysteriously crumbled to fragments.

Nng's aim was good.

"You'll never grow up, will you, Reverential and Sedate?" commented Libby, his employer, from the obscure corner of the yard whence these mysteries emerged. "You're like China itself—at once the youngest and the oldest nation on earth."

To this the sixty-two year old infant was without answer but devoted himself to the food that a coolie set steaming before them.

Uncle Nng, as was usual, declined the tinned milk. He regarded the precepts of Confucius too seriously to do otherwise.

"It is said of the Sage," he remarked, alternately blowing and supping at his bowl of gritty vermicelli, "that he would not take milk without discovering first that the calf at the udder had suckled its fill."

Libby looked quizzically at his wizened Number One "boy."

"And the reason for that, Old Harmonious and Esteemed?"

"To the exalted understanding of the Previously Born," Nng said, leisurely mouthing the sharp Mandarin syllables, "it must be limpid as the skies of Sinkiang that depriving even so lowly a creature as the calf of its proper sustenance is such an unkindness to animals as to merit the punishment of a hell

specially designed; and to fatten upon milk of a cow when the calf has been weaned is but to deserve burning in nine distinct vats of perdition for the sin of betraying a deep instinct of maternity. Ay yah! *Sic semper dammit!* Speech wearies me."

But the verbosity of Uncle Nng had been easier to endure, in these last two barnstorming seasons as medicine man to the western provinces, than some other things; than certain small insects, for instance, that inhabit sleeping-*kangs* of the wayside inns; than the exasperation of his mules and the worry of bandits.

II

THERE was a feline movement at his elbow, and Libby jumped at a damp touch. It was the cold black nose of Ling, Nng's monkey, so named in compliment to the neighborhood brigand, Ling Pei Yu, who was hump-backed and simian. Nng had carried him, against the protest of his young employer, from the very boundary of Szechuan, where the beast had been caught in his native hills.

With irritation Libby pushed toward the monkey his tin of condensed milk, in which there remained delectable lickings for the small creature's tongue. Ling, like himself, was in at least this one particular of the bill of fare, a heretic to Chinese provender. In general, Libby prided himself upon his capacity for adaptation to all things Oriental—including chow.

When Ling had wiped clean the tin he sat up and saluted gravely. Then he watched with an air of intelligent awareness while Libby brought forth a cigaret and prepared to smoke.

This was the signal for an amusing ritual. Uncle Nng pulled from the sleeve of his tunic an old-fashioned cracker-match, and tossed it down at his feet. Ling picked it up eagerly and with the speed of a juggler lighted and held it against the end of Libby's waiting cigaret.

Solely by virtue of this enterprising trick, taught by the indefatigable patience of Uncle Nng, had the beast gained sufferance. Libby had developed for him a thorough dislike. There was something impious and repulsive—something almost degenerate—about his upturned snub nose. In color he was of an unearthly hue shading from burnt orange to an almost purplish black.

Observing that, with his work done, he had become *de trop*, the monkey removed himself expeditiously from the presence of the young American in riding clothes of khaki and the venerable road-guide and factotum, whose garb was brocade of a conventional design. He vanished under the canopy of one of the four Peking carts that comprised Libby's outfit, whisking his tail, as he passed, over the broad countenance of a driver who was sibilant with sleep. Presently, no doubt, he would be perpetrating some indignity upon the tired mules.

Libby extinguished his lantern and, from the sudden darkness that seized them, his gaze joined that of Nng in its quest of the opal smear of sunset visible now over the courtyard wall.

"You think we're quite safe here?" he inquired.

"Safer, Previously Born, than on the open road."

"Just the same I'm sorry we couldn't have reached the village."

"This is better than the village. It is a temple, unused for many years, and untended by priests."

"Well, at any rate it was a good idea of yours to bring us back into the rear compound. I suppose if we keep quiet and show no lights we're not very likely to be disturbed. We might stay here for several days, until the worst of these highwaymen move on into some other district."

The last reflection of day vanished presently from the sky, and in the courtyard there was no light save for the glow of Libby's cigaret and of Nng's bamboo pipe. Save for a renewed snore on a moderate key and the satisfied belching of a coolie politely advertising his repletion of tea and vermicelli, there was no sound.

But into this tranquility came an abrupt disturbance; first a barking of dogs; then a noise of hoofs striking stone; and finally, within the temple enclosure, the echo of speech. Libby was erect, apprehensively, but Nng, with a gesture, cautioned silence. There was an increase of sound, and within the walls of the temple behind which they were sheltered, a final hollow reverberation. The babble of voices thinned to a note of oratory, worshipful or parliamentary—Libby could not tell which. A low murmur among the coolies was stopped by a warning hiss from Nng, who had extinguished his pipe.

"Let the Previously Born," said the old gentleman, without tremor of alarm, "take the shoes from his feet. It will be needful to go quietly."

Libby knew, of old, his factotum's naive sagacity. He complied without comment, and followed, stumbling against obstructions, toward the temple's rear wall. A row of chinks in a decayed door emitted thin slices of light.

III

THE SCENE within was illuminated smokily by wicks flaming at the lips of a pair of old censers, etching sharp at the center of radiation the squatting figures of seven men.

Nng and Libby, each with an eye fastened close to a crack in the door, made out these figures clearly. They faced a low stone platform at the side of the hall, upon which were stationed seven upright tablets of wood, evidently once resplendent with lacquer and gilt, but now disintegrating with age. There was ideographic lettering upon them, probably long since rendered illegible.

Libby felt Uncle Nng's leathery fingers plucking at his arm. Evidently the old gentleman was in an unwonted degree of what might, for him, be called almost excitement. There was a rush of syllables in Libby's ear.

"Bamboo Grove!" whispered Nng. "I did not know. The trees are gone now—and the gardens. Only these walls remain—and those tablets."

"You mean this is the fabled monastery?"

"Temple of the Seven Sages, Previously Born, whose monuments of memory stand rotting in this place."

The whispering ceased, and they returned to their scrutiny. Libby understood well Uncle Nng's allegorical allusion. It was to the classic shrine of seven antique philosophers—a memorial temple now reputed to be used as an eyrie by leaders of outlawry in these western hills. Here, it was the superstition, those chiefs, assuming the titles of the sages themselves, hatched their business of hell, apportioned to their satanic winnowing Cathay's fair hamlets and fields.

Words from the drone of speech from this group became audible.

"Divided," remarked one, "our strength is as the lotus fiber that attemps the tethering of a camel."

"The people snarl as a mountain jaguar," another mourned, "nursing the wound of the hunter's dart."

A third complained—

"Troops of the Flowery Republic grow bold."

Libby caught a significant glimmer in Nng's eyes as a pair of simian shoulders loomed from the circle.

"I, Ling Pei Yu," ran the great beast's scornful chatter, "shall give strength to your hamstrings. Join your men to mine, O Craven but Esteemed, and we shall take cities! We shall gather recruits in ten thousands, and silver in *cattees*. Walls shall fall before us; luxuries shall be under our feet. No more shall we be driven to small theft on the highways, to pilfering in villages. Ours shall be the flowing blood of whole cities, the loot of palaces, the delight of women!"

There was a murmur of assent, a slow bandying of argument, then a gust of mingled speech; and in the end Ling prevailed. They rose and there was a pledge of fealty to the elected leader of new and conjoined iniquities.

They went, and there was silence again

in the hall of the sages. The censers burned low; their wicks presently guttered out.

Nng, composing himself beneath a cart, turned to Libby, sleepless beneath his—

"It is a case, Previously Born, for the weapon of wit."

IV

AT DAWN there was no stirring, as was its wont, of Libby's caravan. Uncle Nng and a small bird of discretion found the pill merchant not difficult to convince that, until the brigand chiefs were well away upon their errand of concerted violence, it would be inviting calamity to tread open roads. And beyond that, Uncle Nng was constrained by a fanciful idea. Professing patriotism, a virtue admittedly shared by none too many of his race, he desired to encompass, through some wile as yet nebulous, the extinction of this ape-like creature, this enemy of the state, Ling Pei Yu.

Libby was easy to convince for the reason that he had no desire to expose unduly his great chest of silver *sycee*, net gleanings of the season's work—a currency of bullion that must reach the bank at Sung Pao before there could be certainty of profit for either himself or his pink-pill backer.

Nng, sallying forth with Ling, intoned words intended rather for his employer than for the monkey.

"The Previously Born," he remarked, "does not thirst this morning for the wind of adventure. His pulse runs faint. Ay yah! But there will be an event that is worthy of note before one more crowing of cocks."

And he trudged through the gate, tilting an ear to the song of a bird, and shaking with zest of life the shriveled folding of tissue that hung like a turkey's wattle between chin and Adam's apple. Ling scuttled at his feet.

"To draw even blood that is evil with a blow of the hand," Nng reminded this simian familiar, "is to demean the elevation of the superior man. Bullets are brutal; and is not a blade debasing? But to slay with the weapon of wit—this is but to walk in the blossomed pathway of transcendant wisdom and worth."

The day was a delight. Save for a corpse that lay by the road and the smoke of a hamlet's cinders—stark evidence that the bandit was even now at his work—Cathay smiled with its eternal beneficence and complacency.

Nng burst forth into falsetto with "Rainbow Skirt and Feather Jacket," the sprightly young air that was jazz to the eighth century. For a space, then, he was silent; his mind did not appear to be intent upon affairs of the moment, but lost in blue mazes of speculation that lie at the red-and-gold gates of Nirvana.

Nng paused to haggle with a hawker for a live fish that was proceeding, no doubt, to some rural kettle. Then, to the intense mortification of Ling, he sought the banks of a streamlet and let it go from its pail into deep, limpid waters. The fish, at first, appeared to be embarrassed, perhaps even piqued, at this unwonted philanthropy. But in a little time it grew somewhat more at ease; then it swam away as if giddy with delight. And Nng, conscious of having acquired merit that might be of service in his affair with the bandit, continued in his course, meditating further upon the way of the superior man.

V

THUS it was that Nng Ta Jen presently entered the village that is known as the Duck's Nest of the Family of Chow. He proceeded into a street called Ten Thousand Fragrant Breezes, which seemed to him arrogant with ten thousand and one smells, and paused before a disreputable tea shop named Place of Sweet Desire and of Heavenly Entertainment.

Reminding himself of the proverb that it is well to have something in the mouth, and of the saying that work may be hastened but not food, Nng stopped for a trivial hour. He was in the mood for

snails; whereafter he consumed a pair of tea-boiled eggs, a pinch of *soya* cheese and a stew of catfish garnished with ginger. Making an end with the bulb of a lily sweetened in syrup, he wet down the whole with a potion of tea. To Ling, sharing these ecstasies, Nng thereupon observed with a sigh of repletion:

"It is a saying of the Master that though there is no one but eats, beneath the two lamps of heaven, there are few who are skilled in the distinguishing of flavors. Fish, to the palate of Nng Ta Jen, has no resemblance to pork. But it is the Sage, Confucius, who has reminded us as well that the superior man deliberates not so much upon what he may eat as upon how he may walk toward the bright goal of virtue. It is necessary, small limb of the great demon Tang, to begin forthwith upon the affair of Ling, thy namesake, the leader of thieves."

Procedure, therefore, was to the house of a tailor. From it Nng emerged, in due time, wrapped in the guise of a Buddhist monk. His gown was mangy and yellow, his felt shoes bandaged with cords. A flat hat concealed the baldness of his scalp, which should have been—though it was not—burned with the twelve pastille scars that consecrate to Buddha. He was equipped for the telling of fortunes. In one hand was a bamboo container of the small sticks and cubes that snatch forth from limbo some hint of Fate's plottings. In the other was a round cage with red bars, which he held with firm, leathery grip between finger and thumb; in it were two green birds. At his feet sprawled Ling.

Duck's Nest of the Family of Chow did not appear to tremble at thought of banditry. Its streets reeled with the rude "stooping soldiers" of Ling Pei Yu—this rabble of deserters from the armies of the republic; of the indigent and the criminal; of the unfortunate rendered lewd, the hungry become outlaw. Yet the villagers seemed secure.

To Nng, the specious priest, walking among them, the reason became speedily apparent. Ling Pei Yu rode by on a white horse, clinging to his seat like a vaudeville monkey. Duck's Nest, it was evident, was being preserved as a base for the bandit's affairs.

Nng followed the white horse; paused when Ling dismounted at the gate of a house; entered, after him, whining for charity. Ling, hearing him, cursed and would have added a kick, but when he saw the monkey his eyes glazed with a commingling of fascination and terror until they were blue like those in a dead sheep's head. His lips sputtered, and Nng heard with difficulty his words. Beckoning, he led the way, and Nng, following, went after him into a hallway, crossed a court and found himself in the incense-choked interior of a small dark shrine.

Ling, the monkey, chattered desperately and wound his tail for a protecting moment about Nng's nearest leg. He was viewing with suspicion, jungle-bred, a tremendous wooden counterpart of himself. But he grew accustomed, presently, to this monstrosity and, before the cringing eye of Ling the bandit, he hopped with the skulking ease and swiftness of the lower anthropoid that he was into the monkey god's embrace.

Nng, taking account of this and the general character of his surroundings, understood that he was in the presence of one of those worshippers of animals that are to be found in corners of the Orient not always to be suspected. Sharply Ling the bandit addressed Nng—

"Your name, priest of demons?"

And into the recollection of Uncle Nng came the legend of Tang, monkey monster of antiquity, whose body was slain forty centuries ago by the great hero, Fang, in a hand-to-hand battle that consumed seven years, seven moons and as many days, but whose life in the invisible ether was made manifest, even today, through the horde of small demons yielding to his sway.

Nng permitted himself to become amply geneological:

"This mean one of the cloth, who hardly dares enter the presence of the

Exalted Prince of Cut-throats, is of Soochow, and in himself is unworthy. But by descent he is of the Dukes of Chow. His first ancestor, in this line, was the great Wu Kang, who was a monk of Chang King temple of the superior capital, who journeyed to India at the time of his mission in Ki Pin.

"Wu Kang was a native of Yung Yang, in the district of the capital. The surname of his canton was Sing Long, and the name of his village was Hiang Yi. His name in the society was Kiu; his appelation was Fong Chow. He descended from the family of the posterior Wei, and heaven gave him intelligence. As showing his filial piety and fraternal love he maintained his family. With fidelity and sincerity he served the state; with probity and assiduity— But this unworthy one does not desire to court weariness with unneeded words."

Ling's yawn voiced antiphonal fatigue.

"Do not suppose, Hind Quarter of Pork," said he, "that in words such as these there is weariness for none but yourself. Are you an astrologer?"

A claw at the end of his long arm indicated the birds.

Nng nodded.

"Then cast me a fortune."

VI

LING seated himself upon a hassock before a stone slab at the feet of the image. And here Nng spread forth his implements. Nausea assailed him at an odor of death from the altar as he stooped to his task. Blood—burned offerings. Ah, this was atavistic, indeed; but yet an aid to him, perhaps, in the plotting of his device.

While Nng fumbled with devious business, Ling the bandit grew restive. He shouted for a servant, and an evil sergeant, taking a bowl from the shelf, brought it brimming with wine. Drinking greedily, Ling tossed a thimble of dregs toward the lips of the god.

Nng lighted candles, released his birds, felt of their crops, and muttered necromantic words. Meticulously he pierced a candle with a pin, and blew out the flame with a long, quivering sigh. Then he inquired concerning the hour and the month of Ling's birth, arranging accordingly his ideogramed cubes. Shaking the container of sticks until one fell to the floor he intoned in the outlandish vernacular of Ningpo a nursery rhyme concerning eels, recited in Mandarin a stuttering page from the most abstruse chapter of the Book of Changes and finished with his vague recollections of King James's version of the Twenty-third Psalm.

"It stands written," he remarked, when these mysteries were done, "that Ling Pei Yu shall take cities. Recruits shall be gathered in tens and twenties of thousands, and silver in *cattees*."

Ling simpered with pleasure; there was a bristling of his hairy chops, and his hunched back was crooked to a new simian resemblance.

"Walls shall fall," resumed Nng, recalling Ling's boasts in the Bamboo Grove. "Luxuries shall be under Ling's feet. No more shall his men be driven to theft upon highways, to pilfering in villages. His shall be flowing blood of whole cities, loot of *yamens*, the pleasures of women!"

"And longevity?" inquired Ling. "How far from this hour flows the River of Souls?"

"Ay yah! This, like all else, hangs like a hair from the chin of Tang. Complacent must be the god toward one who would prosper. Can not he, as when he moved, like Gautama, in the body, multiply each hair into such a demon as himself; contract the stick of his authority into a needle or expand it into a rod of such size as to shatter the earth? Demons in thousands of millions fly at his will; they fill up the chimneys, inhabit the kitchens; they lurk upon every shelf and in every pot; in armies they waylay the traveler, dancing beside him, in front of him, whirling above his head, crying upon him from air, snatching upward for him from earth and from water. Must

there not be due propitiation for such a god as this?"

Ling was green with his demoniac fears.

"An offering," he stuttered, "is burned at the beginning of each moon."

"A burned offering of pig?" Nng was scornful. "Only blood that is human can fatten this god. Bring hither, tonight, when the moon swims overhead, no less an offering than that!"

His tone changed abruptly from such priestly diction. Picking up the bowl from which Ling had tossed off his draught, he examined its fineness, looked with startled pleasure at the purple monkey burned into its glaze. Ling was thorough in his cult!

"And see here," suggested Nng, "have you a bit of kerosene? Fill the bowl with it. Lift it high in libation towards the lips of Tang, then sprinkle it deftly upon the clothes of the victim. The touch of an overturned candle will accomplish the rest."

There was a blaze diabolical in the eyes of Uncle Nng. Ling felt the horror of his words, yet acquiesced with a gibber.

"Thrice already," he chattered, grinning sickly, "has it been done; with female offspring, unwanted."

Within himself Nng felt a shuddering faintness, and new desire for shattering vengeance. Outwardly he was calm.

"Great shall be Ling," said he, "until the monkey leaves the cup; great while the eye of Tang looks upon him with consent."

Involuntarily Ling glanced at the head of his great wooden beast. He sprang to his feet.

"See!" he cried. "The eye of Tang!"

Nng perceived an unwonted glitter in the right socket of the god. He was puzzled for an instant, then he called out, sharply, in reprimand to his pet.

Ling, the monkey, emerged from his post and came simpering with humor to Uncle Nng's feet.

Ling, the bandit, laughed, purple-lipped with relief.

"Hollow!" he explained. "There is emptiness sufficient for a man within the body of Tang."

VII

LIBBY, in the rear compound of Bamboo Grove, had grown weary of mending breeches. He busied himself for a space with letters, then with the making of a couplet in the style of Li Po. And as the day waned he took refuge from ennui in the pastime of overhauling his stock of the small pink pellets that gave him his trade. As one who, barring an infirmity of eyesight, might have been a doctor of philosophy in an American university, he regarded his affairs with an overtone of scorn. But beneath all else he was an adventurer. He had an undertone of humor for this romantic avocation of pill doctor to all China. And it paid, as the chest of silver gave evidence.

At the gateway he paused, caught by the seduction of the open fields of young summer. Then he was away, into the blithe sunset. A short walk would do him more good.

But at the turn of a lane they caught him—four of the hell-brood in Ling's horde. He dashed teeth from the grinning visage of one, chucked another upon his head into a reservoir of muck, but the rest held him. And he lay, presently, bound with thick ropes, before Ling Pei Yu's *kang*.

An unholy satisfaction gleamed in the bandit chief's eyes. His ape-like arms enfolded his own bust with a curious gesture of caress. To an attendant he gibbered rapid commands.

Libby cursed his own stupidity, casting up in his mind the cost to him in *sycee* of this silly escapade. For it would end, he presumed, in the necessity for a ransom.

He questioned his captor concerning this, but was answered with no more than a simian smirk. And for a weary space of time that made him numb and sore from his efforts to loose the ropes

binding him, he was alone in the dark.

Then there were lights, and a pair of men lifted him rudely, carrying him away. They put him down upon a cold slab, in the midst of putrefaction and death. Candles flamed near him, and above their halos he made out the primordial image of a monkey.

Slowly he came to an understanding of his position. Living sacrifice to a god was, he knew, practically unheard of in China. But what was not possible to this half-man, half-beast, into whose power he had now fallen?

Ling entered, stooped, feline in his tread. There was a bowl held level in his long-nailed hands. He approached the altar and stood near Libby's bound body, holding the bowl aloft. Libby could discern in the glow from the candles a splotch of purple in the porcelain glaze—a Szechuan monkey sprawled over the thin vessel's surface.

Words untranslatable from Ling's guttural of sound, flowed from his lips. His eyes burned with a green and fanatic light into the dark sockets of the god.

The bowl trembled, as Ling still held it high, and a dribble of liquid fell to his hairy chops. There was a sudden dull sound, indeterminate, in the dim room—a tinkle of broken porcelain; and the bowl, crumpling in Ling's hands, let its contents go splashing in a small cataract over his gnome-like body.

A shout of superstitious fear came to naught but a choking gurgle in his throat.

"The monkey, O Tang!" he managed to stutter. "Gone from the cup!"

"And with it thyself, Spawn of the Undermost Hell," a voice answered, "to the River of Souls."

Libby, perplexed, felt the swish of a rope of hair across his hot face. Twisting his neck he saw Ling, that rascally pet of his Number One boy, busy as always with pranks of his tail. Impiously the small creature swept up from a spot on the floor where it had mysteriously fallen, an old-fashioned match. In his nimble paws it crackled suddenly into flame, and with the grace of a forest cat, Ling the monkey, anticipating a cigaret between the teeth of the chief of bandits, held his burning match with fatal nearness to the reek of kerosene.

Ling, the outlaw, a burning torch, ran forth shrieking of death.

VIII

THERE was supping, at midnight, in the temple of Bamboo Grove. Nng inhaled with some gusto the contents of a bowl containing gritty vermicelli. And beside him in the dusk of a lantern sat Libby, still dazed, but content with tinned milk for the dilution of his tea. Leaving the container no more than half empty, the merchant of pills set it gratefully before Nng's simian familiar.

"It is not difficult to one of even a mean understanding, Reverential and Sedate," argued Libby when these ceremonies were done, "to conclude that yours was the voice of Tang from within the wooden image. But who, or what, broke the bowl?"

Nng was deliberative for a space, with the air of extinction that sits upon a Buddha. Then he spoke, as he was accustomed, devious and oblique:

"Men of superior mind," he remarked, "engage themselves first in the business of exploring the tendrils of all intricate affairs. When they have succeeded in this, the right course appears limpid and clear as the skies of Sinkiang. Ay yah! But to stand boastfully before men, emitting a stream of glib words, is to become personally obnoxious. *Sic semper dammit!* I do not weary myself with words."

And with no more comment than this Uncle Nng took from his sleeve the childish toy of the day, affixing to its rubber a small pellet of lead.

"Thwack!" his lips playfully echoed to the catapult's sound, as he shattered to fragments with an indubitable aim the thin bowl of porcelain from which he had supped.

Arizony

BY C. E. KILBOURNE

BACK in 1915 I sat in the old club at Governors Island, New York, being one of a gathering assembled to entertain Professor X, a retired member of the faculty of the U. S. Military Academy. The master of ceremonies was old Colonel Y, who served with distinction as a division commander in France during the World War.

The colonel was refreshing the party with a drink he called "two lumps," as the placing of two lumps of sugar in the bottom of each glass was the initial step in the preparation. The professor, who had already enjoyed more than one of these drinks, was toying with the sugar. Absent-mindedly he raised his arm and threw a lump of sugar across the room. It struck a door knob. Then he raised and threw another; that also struck the door knob. The party began to sit up and take notice.

"How often can you do that?" the colonel asked.

"Every time," answered the professor, and proceeded to prove it by throwing three more lumps, each of which caromed off the door knob.

"From early boyhood," went on the professor, "I have been able to throw a small article with unusual accuracy. It seems to be a gift—I take no credit for especial application, though I have practised a great deal. And that reminds me of an amusing experience I once had."

Some thirty odd years ago (the professor related) I became stale on the job at West Point and secured a leave to visit some of my old friends at the frontier posts. To reach one of these it was necessary to travel two days by stage from a small railroad settlement in the desert. I found I was to be the only passenger, and the "mule-wrastler," a hard-bitted plainsman, asked me to ride on the seat with him.

He introduced himself as "Arizony." For the first hour I found him a very entertaining companion. Gradually his conversation began to pall—he had been too universally triumphant in every gun fight, in every poker game, in every contest he had honored with his participation. We halted at noon in a boulder-strewn depression. While he was unhitching, I wandered away.

I was idly juggling a couple of stones when a jack-rabbit came loping around a rock immediately in front of me. He halted in surprize, and without a thought I threw one of the stones, striking him on what would be called, I suppose, the point of the jaw. He dropped instantly. I picked him up by the ears and he suddenly came to life. Holding him across my breast, I made my way back to the wagon. When I came in sight of it I began to stagger a little and to pant.

"Here, Arizony," I gasped. "Come and get this creature. I have chased lots of animals in my day, but this fellow can outrun anything *I* ever tackled before. What is it?"

"My God!" exclaimed Arizony. "Ketched a jack-rabbit! My God!"

"Is he good to eat?" I asked.

"Eat, hell! Why, man, we must show him to the boys. This here thing ain't never happened before!"

We hitched up, loading the rabbit on the stage, and reached the ranch-house where we were to stay over night about six o'clock. I was given a room. Making my toilet I could hear voices in animated conversation. Arizony's was loudest and most constant. He was saying:

"I wouldn't ask you to believe it onless I had proof, but here he is—right here in the wagon box and not a mark on him. But I'll tell you, boys, I and the perfesser had one hell of a run before we ketched him!"

Thomson Burtis

tells a story of

queer birds of the Border Air Service

SALUTE

BEFORE advancing a few choice bits of philosophy, speculation and what have you, I'm going to introduce myself. I do this so that you may promptly divest my theories of any importance whatever, and let them roll off your knife smoothly and without effort. That being done, you can proceed, if you like, to digest the illustrative anecdote concerning the little matter of Lieutenant Percival Enoch O'Reilly, Air Service, Regular Army, versus Lieutenant Ralph Kennedy, Air Service, Reserve Corps.

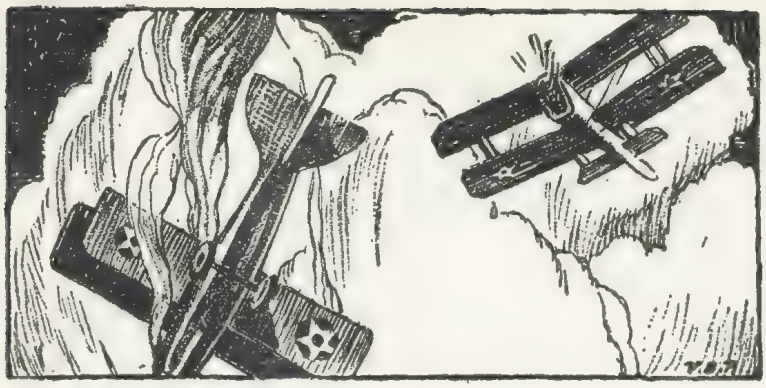
My name is "Slim" Evans, and I, in an idle moment in 1917, became a member of the Army Air Service. I still am, for the simple reason that I'd have to work twenty hours a day in civilian life to make twenty dollars a week. When I was constructed, the supply of brains, beauty and good sense was very limited. However, there was an overplus of noses and feet, so I turned out six feet five inches tall; thin enough to chase a fugitive collar-button down a drain pipe; and standing in a stooped position on a pair of feet so large that I couldn't fall down if I wanted to.

On the credit side of nigh on to ten years as a flyer, I can put the fact that I've done practically no work, made much more money than I'm worth, have avoided monotony and lived through moments of great excitement, not to say thrills. Furthermore, I've met diversified people and events which, thank God, have kept me from being smug, complacent or bigoted about anything whatever. On the debit side of the ledger, I have only a couple of my own teeth left, and they do not meet; I have a bad left shoulder, three elegant and permanent bumps on my head, and more scars on me than there are on an ice rink after an evening's skating.

With this background, you can attach as much weight as you want to this statement. People who've lived long enough and seen enough to comprehend a little bit of the complexity of human beings and the motives which spur them to their daily performances, will never be too hasty in damning a man to his eternal roast. On the other hand, they'll be very cautious about attaching a pair of wings and a halo to any living human.

Once I did that. Everything was either good or bad, including people. There was no middle ground. As a result of that asinine viewpoint, there are memories that rise and smite me when the wind is in the east. R. E. Morse overtakes me and makes life a hell for hours at a time, as I think back to the dumb, cruel things I've done—and the fact that the same things have been done to me by others doesn't help. Here, a girl I've misjudged; there, a man to whom I've said unwarranted things that I'd give my left hand to take back, and—oh, well, you know, I guess, if you're out of your mental swaddling clothes.

Consequently, there may be some importance to be found in the fact that my own personally buried skeletons fade



almost into insignificance before the climax of a situation that I watched on the Rio Grande, in which I, personally, had no part. Furthermore, the things I've seen—gone through, some of them, myself—in ten years of flying become almost like unreal, theatrical claptrap, in comparison with one moment, a mile in the air, that changed a couple of lives and made Penoch O'Reilly into a different man.

You gather, I take it, that the affair made an impression on me.

MY OBSERVATION of the episode started one steaming July morning in McMullen, Texas. Mr. P. Enoch O'-Reilly and myself were members, in good standing, of the McMullen flight of the Air Service Border patrol. There were a dozen flights, consisting of ten or twelve flyers and observers, scattered along the Border from Brownsville to San Diego.

The duty of the blithe young men was to pilot DeHaviland airplanes up and down that squirming trouble area, taking peeks at any little matters such as smuggling, rustling, or a little plain and fancy banditing. We aimed to be a sort of Texas Ranger outfit, riding airplanes instead of horses and, in some cases, if I do say it myself, the boys did pretty well. Well enough to make the roar of an airplane motor like the voice of doom to many a frisky outlaw.

Eleven o'clock was the hour for the mail to arrive. I'd just got back from the western patrol to Laredo and stalked into the office with my helmet and goggles still on. It was only a gesture—I never get any mail.

Sitting on the edge of a desk in the operations room, underneath the mailboxes, was Penoch O'Reilly. He was holding a letter in his clenched hand, and his eyes were gazing out of the window with a look in them which was not good to see.

Enthroned in the inner office, at their respective desks, were "Pop" Cravan, our adjutant, and Captain George Kennard, our C. O. Pop was round and obese and bald-headed, with a fiery temper, a nasty tongue, a soft heart and a keen mind.

"Hell!" he snorted loudly. "Another of those reserve officers ordered here for three months active duty at his own request! I suppose he'll crack up three ships and be more trouble than a case of hives."

"Who is he?" demanded the stocky, spike-haired little captain in his raucous voice.

"Name is Ralph Kennedy, and he's a shavetail in the reserve."

"I know him!" barked Penoch O'Reilly suddenly. "Here's a letter from him, in fact."

"Enter into the sanctum, sirrah, and make him known to me," the C.O. invited him spaciously.

Penoch strode in with ludicrously long steps. He was so short that he'd have to stand on a stepladder to kick a duck in the stomach.

I drifted in lazily, but my curiosity was alive. If I wasn't wrong, the look on Penoch's face, as he brooded over that letter, did not indicate ungovernable enthusiasm about the arrival of the new man.

"I knew him a little before the war," O'Reilly stated in that deep bass voice of his.

Coming from his little body, that voice was as surprizing as it would be to get a brass band effect by blowing on a harmonica.

"He's not so bad, I guess. Lived an eventful life, anyhow. Was a sergeant in the Air Service—in my outfit a lot of the time during the war—and learned to fly then. Got a commission in the reserve when the war was over. He's a wonderful mechanic, and he can tell interesting yarns."

"How well can he fly?" demanded Pop truculently. "With these bandits raising hell, and with scarcely enough crates to get flying time in on, we can't afford to let amateurs spread D.H.'s all over the landscape!"

"Pretty good," Penoch admitted grudgingly. "He was an automobile race driver at one time, a trick motorcycle artist at another, and all that."

"Due in this afternoon," remarked Pop, examining the orders in his hand. "Well, I hope he can play bridge."

Penoch's set face relaxed into the ghost of a grin.

"He's pretty good at most card games," he said mysteriously. "Going back to the tents, Slim?"

"Uh-huh. All quiet along the river, Cap."

"I'll go with you," Penoch said evenly, and we marched out.

We were surely a comedy team together; and we frequently were together, because Penoch and I had become close friends as a result of several imbroglios in which we had engaged. He was just an inch over five feet, so you can readily realize that I could have worn the little squirt for a watch-charm.

"Anything special on your mind?" I inquired casually.

"Yeah; but I'll wait until we get to the tent," he told me.

We marched on down the line of buildings that bounded the southern end of the small sandy airdrome. To the east and west were big black corrugated iron hangars, baking in the sun. Northward, a fence was the rim of the field, and a few miles farther north was the rim of one hundred and fifty solid miles of mesquite.

While we are galloping down the line toward the tents, take a look at one of the most amazing chunks of humanity I've ever met. Penoch, as I've said, was short, but his torso was round as a barrel, and his legs straight and thick and sturdy. His muscles, I'd found, were like steel cables, and his strength was as much out of proportion to his size as his voice was.

It was his face, though, that made him prominent in any company. It was square and brown; and a pair of the largest, keenest, brightest blue eyes you ever saw sparkled forth from it and reflected an unquenchable joy in life for its own sake. His hair was red—not pink or sandy or auburn, but red. His eyebrows had been bleached by the sun to a pale yellow; and below his short, turned-up nose, a cocky little mustache, waxed to pin-points, was a similar tint.

His teeth were big and strong and white, and between them, on occasions, there rolled a loud, Rabelaisian "Ho-ho-ho!" that made the welkin ring. Everyone in hearing distance chuckled with him. He looked a bit like a burly little elf—but when he was serious and worried, as he was now, wrinkles leaped into being, and those eyes got hard as diamonds. Then age and experience and hard competence were written for all the world to read.

He is, was, and will be until he dies, one of the most famous characters in the Army. Some of the highlights of his Army career include being stranded in a West Virginia town, where the miners, on strike, were hostile; declaring martial law without authority and running the town for thirteen days, until he could get out; being captured in the Philippines

by hostile Moros, given up for lost, and finally returning, safe and sound, an honorary chieftain of the tribe; and numberless other accomplishments of renown. He had been court-martialed a hundred times, due to his peculiar sense of humor, and had always been acquitted, because a board of officers who've laughed steadily for hours at the testimony can't get tough.

Incidentally, he usually hauled his friends into any trouble which he found for himself. I myself had been court-martialed, along with him and Charley De Shields, just a month before. All due to his funny ideas. It gives a little sidelight on a man who is tough to describe, so I'll tell it.

THE THREE of us were in San Antonio on a week-end leave, and at one in the morning we were a bit tight, so to speak. Penoch called up a couple of girls for the purpose of throwing a roadhouse dance party. Being respectable young ladies and in bed, they haughtily bawled him out for calling at such an hour. That made Penoch decide upon vengeance. Charley De Shields is just as nutty as Penoch, and I'm no paragon of dignity.

It was Penoch's idea, though. The apartment house was a small one, in a quiet section of town, and it boasted a small, cozily furnished lobby. We proceeded to divest that lobby of all its furniture. When we finished, we had chairs on top of Charley's sedan, a davenport on the hood, and everything from potted palms to rugs and bric-a-brac inside the car. The lobby was furnished with a telephone, when we left.

Out at Donovan Field we rang the doorbells of our friends, presenting each one with a tasty bit of house-furnishing, as a token of esteem. At five in the morning we retired, to be awakened at two in the afternoon by the news that the owner of the apartment house was after our scalps, and that returning the furniture might knock off a couple of years from our sentences.

We'd forgotten just where we'd left the stuff. However, we secured a big truck and went from house to house, collecting. At dark we set forth for town, between cheering lines of unregenerate flyers. Penoch was on the front seat, clasping a large and ornate vase lovingly, to keep it from breaking. Artificial flowers were in his other hand. Charley tended three standing lamps carefully in the body of the truck and I, at the rear end, blushingly chaperoned a frail chair of the vintage of Louis Quinze, a plant in a glass container, and three spittoons.

PERHAPS I shouldn't have mentioned it; but *that* was Penoch. He radiated more energy than his weight in radium; he could fight like three wildcats rolled into one, and he laughed at, and with, life twenty-four hours a day—usually.

Which made his present preoccupation all the more impressive. We said not a word, until we were in my little two-by-four tent.

"Shoot," I commanded, and he set himself for that purpose.

Whenever he had anything of importance to say, he always planted himself with his legs wide apart, as if setting himself against an onslaught, and he talked with his body motionless, except for a stabbing, emphatic finger.

"It's about this bird Ralph Kennedy," he stated, "and I need advice."

This admission from the self-sufficient Penoch was remarkable in itself. It became even more so as I took a good look at his face. It was hard and set, pugnacious jaw outthrust, and his eyes were a curious mixture of cold savagery and dazed bewilderment.

"I guess you didn't exactly shoot your wad to Kennard, then," I said as casually as I could.

"No, I didn't. I never have to any one, except you; and that was because I had to. I'm afraid I've got to now!"

He just clipped those last words off, with snaps of his teeth.

"You know considerable about me,"

he went on, seeming to plant himself more solidly, as his eyes met mine squarely.

"Not so damn' much," I came back. "You were in France, of course, and left the army to join the Kosciusko squadron in Poland. Then you were an instructor in the Mexican Air Service, and finally got back into the Army and went to the Philippines for two years. Now here you are. That's all I know."

"Well, you know I've got into trouble in my life," he stated. "Anyhow, Slim, I'm up against it now. To make a long story short, I come of a wonderful family, I suppose, but I ran away from home, and between the years of fifteen and twenty went through a sort of hell, I guess. That's when I met this bird Kennedy. He picked me up when I was a starving hobo, and he proceeded to use me for his own purpose. I was valuable to him in a lot of ways. He's a sort of crooked adventurer—or was. But I'll swear I was innocent as a baby at the time!"

"The soup begins to thicken," I said slowly. "Well, what happened? What was his line?"

"The first thing he had me do was go around and place a bunch of punchboards in saloons in Buffalo," Penoch said in that fog-horn voice of his. "There were two hundred dollars' worth of punches on each board, and the saloonkeeper was to put up a regulation number of cash prizes—so many twenty-dollar bills, so many tens, and so on, totaling two hundred bucks. When the board was punched out, I was to come around and collect ten dollars for the use of it. We furnished a list of prize-winning numbers, a board to exhibit the prizes on and the punchboard itself."

"That seems all right," I told him.

"Sure." For a second his face lightened, and he was the sparkling, zestful boy again. "But Ralph went around to every saloon and punched out all the prize-winning numbers! Ho-ho-ho!"

I had scarcely started laughing, when his face suddenly turned bleak and cold again, and my laugh, somehow, died in my throat.

"I realized later that I'd been an accomplice in a good many things outside of the law—getting him acquainted with people he could fleece, and all that sort of thing. Finally, he worked the old mine-salting racket; but, Slim, he worked it on me! I thought the thing was a cinch, and I persuaded two well-off men I'd got to know to invest a lot of money in it. It was a plain swindle—me innocent, and those men are looking for me yet, I guess. Slim, he can blast me right out of the Army and—well, jail's a cinch, I think."

I could understand all the implications in his words. My own life hasn't been so easy. And when a man hits the open road, to lick the world from a standing start, and is thrown with the scum of that same world through necessity, often with starvation stalking at his side, there are bound to be episodes which the smug people of this world, who've never missed a meal or had a fight, think damn one to eternity. There are ghosts in the closet of every wanderer that ever lived.

"You think he's out to do you dirt," I said finally.

"Not exactly. As a matter of fact, Slim, I think he likes me a lot. But he's for Number One all the time. As cold and unmoral a snake of a man as ever breathed. He'd throw his family, if he had one, to the lions to save himself. And from the time he caught up with me, during the war, to the time I got out, he haunted me. He got himself made a sergeant assigned to my outfit. He borrowed my money, made me introduce him to people I didn't want to know him, because I distrusted him; he took it for granted that he could have special privileges. And now that he's found me again, he aims to be a parasite for the rest of his life. I know it!"

"The short and ugly word," I observed casually, "is blackmail. A bullet is a merciful death for one of that stripe."

Penoch's hand stabbed out at me.

"I know it. And yet the man is likable in a lot of ways, as you'll see. Maybe he thinks I owe him plenty. In a lot of ways he defers to me, admires me and likes

me. But, as I say, when he gets in any kind of trouble, or wants anything for himself, there isn't a thing in the world as important as himself. He'd loan me money, if he had it, and he'd sell me into jail for five thousand dollars, if he was broke. The only reason in this world that he's coming here is to live off of me. He must be broke, or a fugitive, or something. He'll draw his pay, borrow mine, if he needs it, and never pay it back. He'll take it for granted that I'll do everything in the world for him. If I refuse, he'll use the club he has over me without mercy."

"And he's a reserve officer," I ruminated aloud. "Listen, Penoch. You've got the goods on him. You can plaster him behind the bars. Why not call his hand and take your chances? You were young, innocent—"

"It would kill the folks," O'Reilly said steadily, "and the Army and flying right now means a hell of a lot to me. It's not so easy, Slim."

Which it wasn't, of course.

"Aside from the money angle, Penoch—and say, that needn't be so bad, at that! If that bozo starts to blackmail you out of your dough, there's no reason why 'Tex' MacDowell, 'Sleepy' Spears and myself each can't fix up a bit of a game and get it back from him by fair means or foul. We'll—"

"Won't do, Slim," he told me. "That is, it might, if it was worked cagily. But if he thought for a minute that I'd given him away he'd plaster me to a fare-you-well. And that isn't the worst of it—the money, I mean. He's funny. He's got a hell of a lot of false pride, or maybe he really thinks he's fit to enter any home in the country. He'd just move right in with me, and he'd be so sore he'd never let up on me, if he so much as suspected that I was stalling him off from meeting any of my friends. And there I am! In a position of having to introduce a man I'm not sure won't cheat at cards, make love to a man's wife, or anything else. And if I don't, it's out of the Army in disgrace, and—"

"It's a tough spot," I said unnecessarily, and he stared morosely at me as he said—

"It's no Paradise."

Then his face seemed to harden. It was all in his eyes, and they were bleak and cold.

"But that devil had better not get gay. If worst comes to worst, I'll kick him out of the Army, resign myself, and hit the road."

He sort of grated that out, and I cut in hastily:

"As a matter of fact, he'd better not slip on the cards or the rest of it, or I'll personally get him. He doesn't strike me as any credit to the Army."

"He'll be too smart for that—around the field, anyway. I suppose I'm a coward; but I'll be miserable while he's here. I'm hoping he won't be tempted to do his stuff. Honest, Slim, what do you think? That I'll be a damn' heel to introduce him around? That I ought to give him away to start?"

"No," I told him, after no thought whatever. "Maybe he's reformed. Anybody you introduce him to will be free, white, twenty-one and able to look out for himself. And I see no reason for you to open up a knife, sharpen it and stick it in your own gizzard before it's necessary."

"Well, it won't take long to make it necessary. He'll hang around my neck just once too often."

With that I left him for the bath-house, there to get washed, polished and highly perfumed. During the rest of the day no loud "ho-ho-ho!" rang out over the field. If I had any tendency to forget the situation, Penoch's set face was a constant reminder. Consequently, you won't find it hard to believe that I accepted Penoch's invitation to become a member of the welcoming committee. I accepted agilely, as a matter of fact, and the witching hour of three forty-five found us tooling his dilapidated old roadster down the thronged main street of McMullen, as quietly as a flock of tanks.

McMULLEN is one of those new, shiny, progressive little Texas cities, where transportation includes cowponies and Rolls Royces. It is a mixture of the old and the new. A completely equipped, honest-to-God old cowboy will tie up his horse in front of a store that sells Parisian gowns.

The depot, as always, held a considerable crowd to greet the one daily train from San Antone. No sooner had Penoch guided his panting monster into parking space, and its wheezes and moans died, than a shiny eight-cylinder speedster appeared in the next stall. A feminine voice was yelling:

"Hello, flyers! Who's arriving?"

"Reserve officer; friend of mine," Penoch was forced to say. "How's my secret sorrow?"

"Fine," returned Miss Shirley Curran airily, hopping out of her car and into ours. "Well, I suppose I might as well look him over."

She was nineteen—one of these slightly dizzy, somewhat confusing flappers that senile old men of thirty-odd like myself had a hard time getting used to a few years back. She was slim and thin-faced and good-looking, with boyishly bobbed blond hair, snapping blue eyes, and agile tongue. She was tireless—a slim streak of flame, who could dance all night, ride all day, smoke seven packages of cigarets, and look as fresh as a daisy.

Her dad was a great old Texan, who'd played a lot of poker, drunk a lot of liquor and had been a great ladies' man in his time. She was the apple of his eye—and a good apple, too. She was a pal to many of the flyers; although, for real playmates, she preferred less mature samples of the male sex—college boys and that sort, who could fling a mean hoof.

She chatted along until the train rattled in and Penoch left the car.

"What's the matter with him?" she demanded.

"Just moody, I guess; he gets that way."

"He does not. He's about as moody as our cow."

"Well, you ask him, then," I told her.

As if sensing my own curiosity, she fell silent, and both of us searched the crowd eagerly. We weren't more than thirty feet from the steps of the single battered Pullman, so I could note every line in the face of the man who shook hands so enthusiastically with doughty little Penoch.

That greeting surprized me. Kennedy's eyes were shining; his face held a genial and infectious grin, and I'll swear that it was plain as the nose on my face that he liked Penoch a lot. And Penoch, too, seemed to melt. I guess the memories of a thousand times, good and bad, creates a bond, even between enemies, when they meet after a long separation.

"Isn't he good-looking!" exclaimed Shirley with zest. "That's the cutest mustache!"

And she was right. He was of medium height, dressed in blue serge and a jaunty straw hat. He removed the hat, as they approached the car, talking eagerly. His hair was black as night, wiry and wavy. His eyes were gray or blue, his nose long and straight; the carefully tailored mustache softened a thin mouth. His shoulders were broad, and his body looked as hard as rock.

As they came closer, I had a funny feeling. He fairly radiated personality; but, somehow, in his slightly small, slightly too close together eyes, I thought I could see meanness. Probably it was because of what Penoch had said, but I seemed to see through a shallow layer of geniality and kindness into a man wherein there was neither moral sense nor unselfishness. Just something as cold and impersonal and impregnable as a rock.

As he approached us, his eyes, which I could now distinguish as green, rested continuously on Shirley. If ever I saw bold admiration, I saw it then. There was something coldly appraising in his stare, and an uncanny hypnotic effect. I'll swear I had a job pulling my own optics off his.

I made one or two revisions regarding his personal appearance, too. In the

first place, his hair was shot with gray; in the second place, his chin seemed a bit weak; in the third place, he was an attractive man, despite everything.

When Penoch introduced Shirley and me, he bowed low—a bit too low—and said:

"Pleased to meet you both. So the boy's bought himself a buggy, has he? Some car, 'Peewee,' some car!"

He looked it over with a wide grin.

"It didn't go through the war with you, did it?" he inquired, and he chuckled. It was as merry a chuckle as I've ever heard, too.

Every second or two his eyes would flicker to Shirley's, and never did I see her own gaze drop. When she got into her own car, he handed her in with a flourish, then held her hand a little too long, as he stared into her eyes.

"If you—if you aren't all cluttered up with the well known husband or something, I hope I see more of you, pretty lady," he said airily.

Shirley didn't blush so easily, but the man had her on the run. Despite his careful dress and too careful manners, he gave a subtle impression that he was a rough and ready guy at bottom; but one who had a lot of sheer animal power, without much leavening of civilized feeling. And when he stared at you with those green eyes, you forgot, momentarily, that something that I've tried to describe; the cold, diamond-hard core within him, I mean, and that the geniality of him was a reflection from the surface.

"Nothing like starting to get the old hooks in right at the start," he grinned as he got in with us and waved farewell to Shirley. "By the way, Peewee, how's the old heart been doing lately? Any more of the old dents in it?"

"Nary one," responded little Penoch. "Well, how've you been?"

"Neither here nor there. Not so good lately. Right now, if a house and lot could be bought for a nickel, I couldn't buy a doorknob; so I decided to let Uncle Samuel take care of me for a while. Heh-heh-heh!"

When he chuckled like that, you thought of him as a jovial, humorous scoundrel. And before that twenty minute ride was over, he'd told Penoch a couple of yarns about himself, and had O'Reilly in hysterics and me laughing like the devil. I noted, likewise, that he slipped into the "I seen" and "I done" manner of speech. Being grammatical was foreign to him, as was his bowing to a woman. All surface polish, poorly done.

He moved into the flight with a careless confidence that was sublime. At the dinner table, under Penoch's prodding, he talked and talked with agility and abandon. He'd been everywhere and done everything and, as far as I could tell, he'd been a drunkard and a gambler and a Lothario through it all. Whatever business he had afoot rarely interfered with his wassail and debauch.

He could tell a story so vividly, and with such a sense of humor, that one forgot the bad taste it left in the mouth and just capitulated to the bizarre humor of it. Burglars, gangsters, army officers and persons of high degree came casually into his conversation with bewildering effect. To my dying day I'll never forget his story of a one week's job as chauffeur to a certain internationally famous family. Carnival life, race driving, hot political campaigns, the low-down on the underworld of three big cities. Before the evening was over all these things had been touched on; Kennedy was jovially drunk, and the flight had sat at his feet and listened with unflagging interest. Never once did he slip and make himself an actor in an illegal episode; he was the looker-on, although admitting to friendship with many a criminal.

EARLY the next morning I set off on the western patrol. To make a long story short, I ran into some bandits, held them awhile with my machine-guns, but finally lost them, due to a forced landing that resulted in my absence from McMullen for three days. Finally, with my ship repaired, I flew it back to the

airdrome just at dusk. As I sat down to a late and lonely dinner, Penoch came in with that dignified, long-striding gait.

"How's your friend Kennedy?" I asked him promptly.

"Borrowed two hundred bucks for uniforms and such," he boomed crisply, and sat himself down.

I took one look at him; and that was enough.

"You might as well shoot the works. What's he been up to?" I inquired. "First, how do the boys like him?"

"They get a great kick out of him. They know he's not their equal by birth or breeding or anything like that. It's a sort of patronizing friendship, if you get what I mean. That's what he gets from most people, and what he resents most when, if and as he gets hep to it."

I nodded.

"Well, why the woebegone look in your port eye and the stricken stare in the other?" I asked spaciously.

I didn't want to seem too serious about it. He got to his feet and put one foot on a chair.

"Shirley's fallen right into his trap," he barked. "He's got her hooked tighter than Grant had Richmond; and he's got to lay off!"

"Peewee! Where's the boy?"

Penoch's eyes darted to mine, and his face froze.

"Stick around, and you'll see some fun," he barked raucously, and then his voice reverberated thunderously from the rafters.

"In the dining hall! Come in!"

In came Kennedy, resplendent in a uniform as new as the label on a bottle of bootleg whisky. He was washed, polished and highly perfumed, and he looked well.

" 'Lo, Slim! Welcome home! Say, Peewee, can you slip me twenty? I'm as flat as near-beer. Until pay-day?"

"No, I can't. I'm broke myself."

Penoch was on his feet, legs wide apart, planted solidly. His barrel-like, little body seemed to stretch, until his clothes were drawn tightly over it, and his mustache was bristling fiercely. His eyes were bright and cold.

"I'm a stranger, almost; how about borrowing it for me?"

"No!"

"What's the matter, kid? Ain't sore, are you?"

Kennedy seemed really hurt and surprized. As a matter of fact, it was as plain to me as anything could be that Kennedy thought as much of Penoch as he did of any living human. He never missed a chance to slide in a statement that Penoch was a great little guy; and the number of tales he recounted that first evening, to prove what a fighter, thinker and all-round champion Penoch was, were numberless.

"Not exactly. But I've got something to say to you, Ralph, and now's the time. First off, Slim, here, and Slim alone, knows the works. Understand?"

"Who told him?"

Kennedy's face was a mask, now, and the eyes of a snake looked into mine, then shifted to Penoch.

"I did."

"Give yourself the best of it?"

There was venom dripping from his tongue when he said that. He backed away slightly, as if fearful of a physical assault.

"What a fine pal you are!" he spat.

"Be that as it may, you listen. You lay off Shirley, Ralph, or I'll have your history published in the paper! I've hinted at it before. Now I tell you!"

Penoch's were blazing into Kennedy's, and his right fist was stabbing the air. He was set for the battle, be the result what it might.

"Just where do you think you'd end up in that case? And where do you come in to criticize anybody else?" sneered Kennedy.

His eyes seemed rat-like then, somehow, as if they were flickering about for an opening for escape.

"For the sake of argument, we'll say nowhere!" Penoch fairly roared. "I've paid your bills and hauled you around, and introduced a man I wasn't sure

wouldn't steal family jewelry, to plenty of people. So far, I haven't had anything but worry over it. But this is different."

"So you're pulling the big blackjack, are you? Rough-stuff, huh? Well, I'm pretty good at that myself, Peewee. So you mind your own damn' business—or else—"

Kennedy's eyes were flat and green and cold, his lips drawn back in the suspicion of a smile, and he looked as close to cruelty incarnate as I care to gaze upon. And hard—gosh!

"I'll do no such thing. And you get just exactly three days to wind up your little affair with Shirley, or I start talking. You can start at the same time, and be damned to you! But we'll both go down together, big boy. You'll go down farthest. My resignation'll be in before I start shooting off my mouth; I figure on that."

For a long ten seconds Kennedy's unwinking eyes bored into blazing Penoch's. The indomitable little flyer, as if carved out of granite, stood there and waited. Kennedy threw his cap on the table. His voice softened, and in a wheedling tone he said:

"What's all this about, Penoch? Good lord, boy, don't go off half-cocked. I ain't done nothin' to Shirley or her old man."

"Not yet, maybe! Why she ever fell for you, I don't know; but she has. And if you've got any intentions at all, they're rotten, and I know it. You couldn't marry her if you wanted to, and if you could and did, she'd break her heart in six months. You're a natural born crook and you know it. You're a great guy in some ways; but there isn't one gram of honesty in your whole body. You'll end up broke or in jail, as sure as there's a jail left. You never gave a woman in love with you a square break in your life, or hesitated at getting everything you could out of any man or woman who got in your power.

"And if you think I'm going to be responsible for getting a kid like Shirley into any mess with you, you're crazy! If you get her she'll know what she's getting, and I don't mean maybe. You're no more eligible to wear that uniform or to mix socially with Shirley than I am to be the Grand Gazabo of Guam. Now, by God, you make up your mind. You're going to do one decent thing in your life, and you're going to do it within three days, by wiping Shirley off the slate and staying where you belong. If you don't, you know what I'll do. That goes just exactly as it lays!"

Penoch had been talking in low, deep tones, but every word was like a muffled bullet. When he had finished, a dangerous human being was crouched, figuratively speaking, with his back to the wall. I put in my horn then, having been stricken with an idea.

"Penoch's right, big boy," I told him. "As a matter of fact, why the hesitation? Shirley means nothing to you except a time-passer—a kid like that."

"Is that so? How do you know so much?" he snarled.

His eyes flashed to Penoch's.

"Gone back on me, have you? All right, you lousy little double-crosser. Watch yourself, and plenty! I'll—"

"You'll what?"

O'Reilly had covered the space between them in one bound, like a bounced ball. Suddenly sheer hatred burned from two pairs of eyes. Kennedy licked his lips, and his smile was mirthless and his eyes indescribable.

"I said to watch yourself," he said softly. "I don't like people that talk too much."

"I guess," I interrupted slowly, "that it may be time for me to do some talking."

"Talk all you want to; but you stand the gaff, and don't forget that, Peewee!"

The look he threw over his shoulder, as he walked out, left no doubt about what he meant. O'Reilly's body relaxed slightly, but his face remained set and strained.

"I've always thought," he said slowly, "that there weren't many bozos in the world I'd hate to have as an enemy as much as I would Ralph. And now the wad is shot, Slim. I guess I'm in for it.

But what the hell? The fact that I've talked to you will be the last straw, as far as he's concerned. Shirley or no Shirley, he's doing a lot of low and lofty thinking right now. And he'll have a way figured to get even with me, if it takes a year, without hurting himself. Three days from now should be interesting, what? Ho-ho-ho! The skeletons'll be out doing a song and dance for all McMullen to watch, eh?"

Now that the die was cast, Penoch was himself again, daring the world to do its worst. Indomitable, hard-boiled, soft-hearted, he flung his loud, raucous laughter in Kennedy's face, so to speak, challenging him and the universe in general to get him down.

"Why couldn't you have talked quietly to Shirley," I asked him.

"Tried to," he boomed absently. "She wouldn't even listen. She's nuts, I tell you, and the old man likes him. He's given them a long song and dance about his automobile business in Los Angeles, and all that stuff. If I went to the old man and told him, there'd be hell to pay; the truth would come out that I had peached on him, and then my neck would be chopped neatly. Whichever way it's done, there'll be the same result when I expose him. I'm sunk myself."

"Right now," I ruminated, "he may not be satisfied with just smearing your reputation and having you tried for that mine salting business, at that. Struck me he'd love to throttle you."

"I guess he would," Penoch said calmly. "He served five years for manslaughter in Virginia once."

I WENT to bed early. I hadn't had much sleep for three days, so at ten o'clock in the morning I was still pounding my ear commodiously. I was awakened by long, lean, drawling Tex MacDowell.

"Take a peek at the paper and then arise and shine," he told me. "We start for the Gulf of Mexico in exactly one hour."

One peer at the headlines, that took up half the front page, awakened me as thoroughly as a pail of ice water would have.

"Laguna In Ruins!" the paper screamed in letters big enough to put on a signboard.

Within a moment I had the details. One of those tidal waves, estimated as at least a hundred feet high and two miles in width, had swept in from the Gulf. Doubtless the result of a volcanic eruption on the sea floor. According to the meager reports available, every house, structure and living thing existing in the portion of Laguna, within a half mile of the beach, had been doomed by that vast crush of water. The remainder of the town, back farther from the beach, had been inundated; but houses were standing, and many of the people had escaped alive. The low country—marshy ground, a lot of it, anyway—was under three feet of water, and Laguna, as well as small settlements along the beach, which had likewise been demolished, was a marooned and ruined little city. Telegraph lines down, railroads washed out, telephones useless, and at least one thousand people dead or washed out to sea.

"We go over to patrol the Gulf for survivors," Tex said tersely. "Donovan Field ships will ferry food and water and medical supplies down. We leave in an hour. Get a move on!"

All I could think of, as I made passes at my whiskers and leaped into my clothes and gulped some food was this—how must it feel to look up and see millions of tons of water about to fall on you? A ten foot wave in a storm makes me feel like an ant bucking a steam roller.

Four men were to be left at the field for patrol. Six ships were warming up, as I ran out on the field. The roar of the half-dozen four hundred and fifty horsepower Libertys fairly shook the earth, and their propellers send clouds of dust swirling upward. As I approached the line, a car tore into the airdrome. There was Shirley, her hair blowing in the wind, as she streaked down the road toward the ships.

As I got closer, I saw her fling herself out of the roadster and make a beeline for none other than Kennedy. Penoch O'Reilly was standing near by, his face a study.

"Kennedy going down?" I asked him, noting meanwhile that Shirley and Kennedy were holding hands.

"Begged to," boomed O'Reilly. "He's got guts, all right, and a craving for excitement."

"How's he acting—toward you, I mean?"

"Doesn't speak. Hardly speaks to anybody. I think he's afraid some of the rest are wise to him."

Just then I saw Shirley lean forward, as if to kiss him good-by. He looked around almost furtively and held her off. Mr. Ralph Kennedy, for the moment, was very unsure of his ground. As Penoch and I passed him on our way to our ships, his eyes rested on us for just a moment. They were passionless, but when his face was serious the meanness in it seemed to be intensified. Funny what an effect eyes too close together can give. Add that mouth—and my imagination—and perhaps you can see what I mean. Somehow, I shivered.

A moment later I was in my ship, giving her the last look-over, as she strained against the wheel-blocks. Oil pressure, air pressure, rotations per minute, battery-charging rate, temperature—all were O. K. Captain Kennard was already swinging out on the field; I being Number Two followed him, and the others took up the parade in their proper positions. One by one we took off, circling the field for altitude in single file. At a thousand feet the C. O. zoomed, and I slid in, twenty-five feet behind him, twenty-five feet to one side, and ten feet higher than he. Tex MacDowell came in on the left, and the others followed, until a V of ships, three on one side and four on the other, turned eastward and thundered their way toward the Gulf.

FORMATION is tricky stuff. You hold your position by throttle-handling alone. There are no brakes on airplanes, as you may have heard. It's no time to commence mooning upon the whichness of the what, nor the why of the how. You 'tend to your knitting, if you don't want a collision, and I 'tended to mine plenty. Subsconsciously I noted that Kennedy, at the rear of the left side, was holding his position well. Pretty fair flyer, he was. Penoch was behind me.

In an hour we were on the outskirts of the flood district. Ten minutes later I was stealing looks at the ground. We seemed to be flying over a shallow lake, from which houses and barns and cattle protruded. About two feet of water, I should say, covered the ground, and dozens of people were gathered on each knoll. Houses were down here and there, but not until we reached the outskirts of Laguna itself, did the real devastation become apparent.

As we circled that town, it seemed as if I couldn't move. It looked like some gigantic canvas, whereon some artist had painted his idea of a shambles. The back part of the town still had buildings; the streets, clogged with small débris and overturned automobiles, was the sole evidence, save for broken chimneys, of the water. The beach section was nothing but one gigantic rubbish pile. Ten-story buildings had toppled and fallen in ruins, and for a space of at least a square mile, it seemed, there was not even a lane through the wreckage. Try to picture a heap of rubbish, so gigantic that a hundred automobiles, or more, flung upon it looked like so many flies. Dozens of boats, ranging from oil-tankers to canoes, had been flung hundreds of feet inland, like so many children's toys flung on a dump.

The Gulf itself held a scum of débris of all kinds, and its shore, as far as we could see, was a rim of ruins.

I had not seen a single spot where a landing was possible. Kennard had wig-wagged his ship, and one by one we fell into single file. Down below, thousands of people—the survivors—had their heads

turned upward. Down in the ruins I could see bodies, now, and out in the bay unnumbered corpses were floating.

Suddenly Kennard started down, and then I saw what had been done. There had been other disasters and floods in Texas, when the airplanes had saved lives. Laguna had prepared. A force of hundreds of men was just finishing the job of clearing a hundred-foot runway down the hard-packed beach on the outskirts of the town; and it was there, one by one, that we landed, to face haggard, hollow-eyed men, steeped in tragedy.

MUCH happened during our days at Laguna; but that has nothing to do with Penoch O'Reilly and Ralph Kennedy. Anyway, twenty minutes later we were all back in the air, carrying packages of food and water, put up to float. Each of us had a sector assigned. We went roaring out over the open Gulf, spotting survivors who were floating on improvised rafts or clinging to planks. Kennard's ship, with Jack Beaman at the radio key, was flashing information to San Antonio. Soon the Donovan ships would be coming in, carrying supplies.

As we got out over the water, I turned to look at George Hickman, pointing downward. He's big and blond and nerveless; but his face was strained, and there was the closest thing to fear, that I've ever seen in his eyes.

As for me, I was one jump ahead of a fit. Down below, flashing along between carcasses of human beings and animals, were what seemed like untold hundreds of fins, cutting the water and feeding on their prey. Six times we swooped low to drop food and water to those poor wretches down below us. We could almost look into sharks' eyes, and time after time the flash of a white belly announced another mouthful.

Remember this, too. If we came down in the water, we could float two hours. There was not a single serviceable boat to rescue a soul.

I flew six solid hours that day, as did every one of the others. It was just before the last patrol, and getting dusk, when I ran into Kennedy for the first time. Our landings hadn't synchronized before.

"God!" I heard him mumble in an unutterably tired voice. "This'll drive me nuts! I can't even swim, if I come down."

"No difference, my boy," Jimmy Jennings told him with an attempt at jauntiness. "None of us could swim over a mile. Who thinks he could make five hundred feet through that forest of fins?"

And he was right. It seemed as if every shark in the Atlantic ocean had come to the picnic. But there were still unexplored sections, little towns along the shore which needed help, and on we went. Twenty Donovan ships were ferrying supplies; one came in almost every ten minutes. God knows we were willing to fly until we dropped. Those poor devils down in the water will haunt me to my dying day, I guess.

THE SUN was setting, when I turned around from a spot ten miles out in the Gulf, my last package dropped and my patrol over. My twelve-cylinder Liberty had never missed a lick, and I remembered saying over and over to the rhythm of the motors:

"If you'll only keep it up—if you'll only keep it up—"

My ears were ringing from a day's bombardment; my face was so sunburnt with sun and wind that it was sore as a boil, and I was more tired than I've ever been in my life. Two other D.H.'s, one a mile to my right and the other on beyond, were coming home across the vile, befouled water.

I was two thousand feet high, and land was six or seven miles ahead, when Hickman grabbed me with a grip like a vise. My heart did a backflip, and I turned as if I'd been shot. He was pointing to the right. In a second I had swung my ship and was flying wide-open toward that middle D.H.

It was coming down in a shallow dive. The propeller was turning as slowly as a

water-wheel. One look was enough to tell me that the motor was dead, and that only the air-stream was moving the stick.

Two of the boys were going to the sharks.

I was diving now, motor full on. I don't know why. I guess I had some wild idea that I could help them out. The other ship was heading for the falling D.H., too. We ranged alongside it almost together. The pilot in the crippled plane was Ralph Kennedy. The man in the third ship was Penoch O'Reilly.

Everyone was flying alone, except me, for two reasons. One was to leave more room for supplies to drop; the other was to conserve manpower as much as possible. I had George along to work the radio. We'd reconnoitered some outlying towns on the trip.

It seemed a year before the ship hit, and I was thinking at top speed, searching for some possible method of saving Kennedy. He could float for two hours; then he'd be sunk—

Just before the ship hit the water I let out a wild yell, which I myself couldn't hear. Right ahead of Kennedy was a huge, partially submerged thing floating. It looked like a bunch of logs tied together. I guess he never saw it.

The ship crashed into it with its undercarriage. Just what happened I don't know, because the water rose in a geyser, and I couldn't see for a moment. But what I saw, when the water subsided, was plenty.

It seemed that the ship had been crumpled completely. It had turned on its back. Kennedy was invisible. The fuselage had broken in half, the wings crumpled back, and the motor, of course, was under water. That little heap of wreckage would become water-soaked in a few minutes. It would sink in a quarter of an hour, instead of in two hours.

I guess I was shaking a little. I remember Penoch, circling and circling. Kennedy had not come to the surface.

"Knocked out and drowning—maybe a mercy," I was thinking, and four fins, circling, sent cold chills up and down my back.

Then he came to the surface. He struggled weakly to climb up out of the water, but it took him a full two minutes. Even then he was partly submerged. Suddenly the sight of those fins set me crazy, I guess.

"I'll give him a chance to drown, at least!" I fairly shouted at them; and the next second I was pouring machine-gun bullets into the shadowy green monsters, and they were floating, dead, on the surface of the water.

There was not one single, solitary thing that could be done to save him. Two minutes more, and his frail life-raft would be sunk. There was no time to fly back and get something to which he could cling and drop it to him. He couldn't swim.

I fairly froze in my seat, as a great mass of water rose from the sea. As it cleared, I saw the tail of Penoch's De-Haviland, high in the air, less than ten feet from Kennedy. The next second Penoch was clambering up on the wreckage of his own ship. A few seconds later he was stripped to his underwear, and swimming toward the crippled Kennedy.

As the little devil was towing his enemy I came to myself. I circled watchfully above the water, and machine-gunned an approaching shark. As I did that my stunned brain got working. I don't think I'm either better or worse than the average. I'm franker, that's all. If I had been sitting in my ship, while my deadly enemy was dying a sure death, I would have been conscious of a sense of relief.

Penoch O'Reilly had landed to give him two hours more of life; it seemed a certainty that at the end of two hours, Penoch, too, would go down to the sharks, with the man who had almost ruined his life.

Then and there that squat, little figure, ho-ho-ho-ing at life, grew into a giant, towering above ordinary mortals, as far as I was concerned.

"There must be some way," I kept

telling myself over and over as I circled them. Maybe I hypnotized myself into an idea. I gave a warwhoop of relief. Anything was better than one hundred per cent. hopelessness.

Kennedy was hurt. That was apparent. Penoch had to drag him up on the fuselage, and then the reserve man lay there as if he were completely out.

I made wild motions to Penoch; he nodded. He was standing up, a small white figure, his feet far apart to brace himself against what fate had in store. As I sped for land, I almost thought I could hear him laughing that deep-toned, Rabelaisian laugh, flinging his challenge to the gods, a small white speck in the dusk.

A moment after I had landed, I'd told my story. Tex MacDowell and Sleepy Spears were in their ships in two seconds less than nothing, and we were off. When we arrived, Penoch had the upper left wing detached, and Kennedy was on it.

From there O'Reilly started his heart-breaking journey, a full mile, pushing that wing slowly through the water, his legs kicking tirelessly. Kennedy, partially recovered, was using the verticle fin as a paddle to help. Three airplanes cruised round and round over the ugly water, and not a shark got within our lines. Every second was a strain, for the sharks could come up from below and get Penoch, but they did not. With so much dead meat in the sea, I guess our outfit was entirely too suspicious for them to bother with.

It was ten minutes after dark when Penoch and Kennedy staggered up on the beach. Kennedy collapsed. When I got out of my plane, I was swaying like a rubber lamp-post, and before Penoch had been taken care of and got back, I had eaten and fallen on a cot, fully dressed, but dead to the world.

STRANGE as it may seem, I didn't see either of them next day. Our flyings came at different hours, and when one was on the ground the others were in the air. And at three in the afternoon, when I landed, I found that Penoch and Kennedy and Pete Miller had started back for McMullen. Kennard, Sleepy and Tex and I started home at five o'clock. There were Donovan ships available, and there'd been another bandit raid in our territory. The patrol was needed on the river.

I saw Penoch in the mess-hall, at dinner, and sat next to him. We were all ready to drop, and hadn't even washed. Kennard went to sleep over his soup. Sleepy Spears gave up after the meat course, and stumbled out to bed.

"Where's Kennedy?" I asked Penoch.

"In at Shirley's—for dinner," he said tersely and, as our eyes met, I guess our thoughts were the same.

"Then what you did for him had no effect, eh?" I finally asked him. "How'd he act?"

"Avoids me."

"I see. Come clean, Penoch. It must have been a temptation to leave him down there, even if you figured you'd have a good chance of saving him."

Penoch buttered some bread thoughtfully.

"I just couldn't; and I'd never thought of that wing gag. Just had an idea that there ought to be some way out—"

"So you tossed a few sharks right out of your mind, eh?" I interrupted.

"Oh, hell, I didn't think of anything, except how nice it would be if he was dead. Well, old-timer, he's sure slapped me in the face tonight by going back there. Shows what he is. Hell, I've been doing things for him all my life, and he's willing to blackmail me. Guess I was a damn' fool back over the Gulf, eh? Well, there'll be excitement about in a few days, I guess. Better get some sleep tonight. Ho-ho-ho!"

I knew then that he had fully made up his mind, that he'd considered everything, and was ready to go. And when that crisis was passed with Penoch O'Reilly, he feared not man, devil or circumstances. Right at that moment he figured that the Army was a thing of the past and that the world was waiting to be bucked by a

man in disgrace. The tougher it was, the louder he'd laugh.

The next day we both saw Kennedy at breakfast. He greeted us with a straight stare, said, "Hello," in his customary breezy manner, ate with relish, and was absolutely himself. His eyes were as cold a green as ever, except for that surface shine that came when he laughed. He told a good story about Noah and the Johnstown flood, indulged in his reminiscences of the Columbus raid and likewise the Galveston flood, in all of which he had participated with considerable gusto.

I just sat there and watched him. That clear-cut, hard face and those fishy eyes made as impenetrable a mask as I've ever seen.

"The hell it's a mask!" I finally told myself. "He just hasn't any feelings that can't be expressed in a grin or a laugh or a snarl. He couldn't hate anybody real hard any more than he could like anybody very much. Except himself."

At lunch he came breezing in with:

"Well, well, the good old feedbag'll be fastened round my snoot *pronto*. The meal ain't been cooked that I can't clean up by myself."

He shook out his napkin, grasped his fork firmly and started in at the salad. His eating was not a pronouncedly delicate proceeding. It was audible for miles around when he wasn't trying to act unnaturally elegant; and I believe that in a straight contest Kennedy's eating anything could drown out my snoring.

"By the way, Peewee, my lad, how about a bit of poker at Shirley's Old Man's house tonight? I was given instructions to ask you and Slim to come out. Sheriff Trowbridge'll be there, too. Come, and bring your checkbook, because it's my night to howl!"

Penoch just looked at him. Kennedy stared back with a mirthless smile.

"Risk a few nickels!" he gibed. "I ain't seen your game for years. How about it? Shirley'll be glad to see you both, she said. She ain't had much time—"

"Yes, I'll go."

Simple, those words. But I knew as surely as I knew that I was at the table that Penoch's deliberate interruption was a threat. He stared straight at Kennedy, and the implication in his statement was plain for me to see. That poker game that night was to include some unscheduled fireworks. Shirley and her father were to hear some hitherto unknown episodes in the lives of Ralph Kennedy and Percival Enoch O'Reilly.

"Fine! A good time'll be had by all," Kennedy came back. "You act as though you'd been invited to risk your life, or attend your own funeral. Heh-heh-heh! Didja hear him say that, boys? Peewee don't think any more of a nickel lost at cards than he does his left eye."

There he sat, gibing at the man who had saved his life. It was apparent to any one that there was a deadly undercurrent in the conversation between the two. I saw Kennard and Tex and the others looking at them speculatively.

Directly after the meal I put it up to Penoch.

"You're going to lay your information on the line tonight, eh?" I asked him.

"Right. And my resignation'll be written. He doesn't intend to back away from Shirley. I can see that. Maybe what I say won't change a thing; but she'll go into it with her eyes open."

"Damn' funny, at that," I said in considerable bewilderment. "I don't see why a girl—any girl—could mean so much to Kennedy that he's willing to run the risk of exposure as a criminal. I—"

"He doesn't think I'll go through with it," rasped Penoch. "Well, I'm going to take a nap."

He strode away, his short legs twinkling through the dust, toward his tent. He didn't sleep, though, because I peeked in a few times. He wrote reams of letters, setting his house in order, as it were, before he moved out. And he didn't seem so downcast. In fact, the devil-may-

careness of his face had increased, and there was hard recklessness there. He had taken his hundredth knockout blow from fate; and he was still standing erect, unbeaten.

It was a long and tough afternoon for me. Kennedy flew a patrol, and then took a long time dressing for dinner. At the meal he was in excellent form, holding the floor continuously with ribald tales, which were good. And Penoch O'Reilly, his eyes bright, seemed strung to a high nervous pitch. His roaring "Ho-ho-ho!" rolled forth continuously, and he and his enemy fought a silent battle of eyes beneath the laughter. I was depressed and silent, but possessed with such infinite hatred and repulsion when I thought of Kennedy that I could have stuck the bread-knife in his throat and enjoyed it.

I FELT as if I were riding deliberately into disaster, when we went to the Curran house. Sheriff Trowbridge, Gargantuan old-timer, who had been friend and aid to the flight since its inception, was already there. He was six feet two, with a shock of iron-gray hair, a great mustache, and a genial old face tanned to mahogany. He and Mr. Curran had been friends for years and, as we came up on the porch, Mr. Curran yelled in stentorian tones—

"Three new customers, sugar!"

He was tall and thin and bald, with piercing eyes and an aquiline nose, all of which gave him the appearance of a soft-hearted old eagle.

In a moment Shirley came out, bearing three long, cold drinks. Her eyes were on Kennedy. When I saw the smile on her lips and the look in those eyes, I sort of caught my breath. I don't know much about love, but almost anybody can recognize it when it stares them right in the face.

She was all in white, her golden hair slicked back, throwing her features into bold relief. Slim and lithe and tall, she looked every inch a thoroughbred. Kennedy, as he bent over her, was a good-looking officer, too. You couldn't see those mean eyes, in profile.

"And women are supposed to have intuition!" I groaned.

At that, there was a sort of new note in Kennedy's smile—a trace of real feeling—when he looked at her; and his eyes were a little less hard, maybe.

But the adulation was principally on her part. From the time the game started he seemed to avoid even looking at her. He played quietly, as did everybody. Every man around that table was a lover of poker and a hater of conversation when the pasteboards were being wooed. Even Shirley had had it bred in the bone, I guess, and never said a word. She 'tended to the ash receivers, brought us drinks, and finally went out on the porch to throw a ten-minute sop to a boy friend who had called on her.

The game was twenty-dollar take out, table stakes, and either draw or stud, to be played at the option of the dealers. Penoch watched Kennedy like a hawk, and so did I, on general principles. Not that I really thought he'd try his tricks there.

The most amazing thing to me was his utter nonchalance. He knew what Penoch was going to do before the evening was over; and he grinned into the little flyer's face and dared him with his eyes.

It was close to ten o'clock, and I was about fifty dollars ahead, Penoch even, and Kennedy sixty dollars winner. We'd been taking the two old-timers over the jumps, to our great glee and their humorous disgust.

It was Kennedy's deal. He shuffled them, and I saw him casually put an ace on the bottom before he started. When he finished, he gave the cards a rapid double cut—bottom half of the deck placed on top, but a little forward of the other half of the deck. Then he simply cut again, and that little shelf between the two halves of the deck enabled him to replace the cards exactly. That is, after two cuts, the cards lay exactly as they

had before he'd cut them, the first time.

It was my cut, and he did not offer it, but started dealing.

My eyes were busy from that moment on. My heart was pounding as I visualized the possibilities. Maybe I could get Penoch out of the mess.

Card after card fell. Kennedy was high, with a king showing, and held the bet until the fourth card had dropped, when Sheriff Trowbridge drew an ace. I stayed, and Kennedy raised ten dollars. That dropped Penoch and Mr. Curran. The sheriff came back with a thirty-dollar re-raise, and I, with a pair of fours, dropped and devoted myself to watching. Had that cut been an accident? If it hadn't, how had Kennedy stacked them for himself? Or did his crookedness merely include the placing of one lone ace to use if necessary?

He came back with a fifty-dollar raise—his stack. The sheriff, who had bought four times already and had plenty of chips in front of him, saw the raise.

Every eye was concentrated on Kennedy. I was peering so hard it hurt, and somehow my mouth felt dry. Shirley came in, her eyes widening at the size of the pot. She stood back of Kennedy, without saying a word. I knew that she comprehended the hands perfectly—the sheriff with ace, queen, ten showing; Kennedy with king, queen, deuce.

Slowly Kennedy flipped the sheriff's card. A seven. Kennedy studied his own hand a moment, and his eyes flickered around the table, a curious light in them. Suddenly he dealt. An ace! And from the bottom of the deck, so clumsily done that any one in the world could have caught it.

"Pair of aces!" he crowed, showing his hole card.

The silence was like a physical substance, throbbing and heavy and packed with evil. My eyes rested on Shirley's face. Her eyes were wide and horror-stricken, and she looked as if she were about to scream.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by the blow of Curran's fist on the table. As if it had set a spring into action, every man around that table, except Kennedy, was on his feet.

"Out of this house, you thieving, yellow, sneaking crook!" thundered the old man furiously. "There ain't a man here didn't see you take that ace from the bottom! Git out, I tell you, or I'll—"

He choked with his own wrath, as he crouched as if to leap across the table.

Kennedy got up leisurely, his eyes hard enough to make one's flesh crawl. They held an expression that I can not describe, but this I was sure of, crazy as it seemed—there was no rage in them. Perhaps he couldn't feel deeply enough to wax furious. It was as if he were dead.

"I guess you caught me," he said evenly.

He pulled down his blouse and ran his hand through his hair. Penoch was like a statue. Not one sound broke the stillness.

Then there came a strangled sob from Shirley. She rushed from the room, and from somewhere in the hall, before she got out of earshot, we heard her weeping.

I licked my lips with my tongue. I saw Curran's face twitch, and such demonaic fury leap into his eyes that I was afraid of murder. I believe he'd have sprung at Kennedy in another second.

"Sorry. Good night," Kennedy said slowly, almost as if he were playing a part.

He walked out without haste, and without a word or a look to any one of us.

"God! I'm sorry!"

Penoch's deep bass seemed to reverberate from the walls. As the sheriff broke into deep curses, Penoch interrupted him.

"Please, Sheriff, let me get this off my chest. Maybe you'll be through with me, now, too."

They sank into their chairs, Mr. Curran wiping his brow with a shaking hand. As Penoch made a clean breast of his relationship with Kennedy, I half listened, but I didn't pay close attention at that. A thousand crazy ideas were running through my head, and suddenly it seemed as if I couldn't wait to get

Penoch alone. I had a queer hunch.

Those old-timers understood the little flyer's position, and the sheriff summed up the general sentiment, when he put his hand on Penoch's shoulder and told him:

"Mike, here, and me, ain't blamin' you a bit, son. And you was ready to prevent any trouble. You couldn't be blamed, any way you take it, for givin' him the benefit of the doubt for a while. Gosh! What a snake in the grass he is! And I aim to git him in jail. We'll plaster him for life—"

"And me with him," barked O'Reilly.

"Not a bit of it. Say, young feller, he can go up for a long time right in this country for what he done! More'n he deserves for this trick; but we'll sort o' consider his other crimes, see?"

"Listen Sheriff," I found myself saying. "Some way or another I've got a funny idea. Let me talk it over with Penoch and call you back, eh?"

The leonine old man peered at me through puckered eyes.

"Shore," he commented. "But what's the secret?"

"I'll tell you when I'm sure of it myself," I told him. "Good night, Mr. Curran. I sure hope Shirley won't take it too hard."

"She will, for awhile. But when I think o' what might 'a' happened if he hadn't give himself away—say, I ought to be thankful for this night!"

We had no sooner got out the door and into the car than I said:

"Don't start her for a minute. Penoch, my boy, just how good it was, or ought to be Kennedy with his fingers and a deck of cards?"

"Used to be a wonder!"

"And he deliberately, before five people, does the clumsiest piece of cheating a man ever did in the world! If he'd wanted to be caught, he couldn't have done it more openly."

"By God!"

It was almost a prayer from Penoch. Then he faced me, tense and strained, and his attempted whisper couldn't have been heard more than a hundred feet.

"He couldn't have done it deliberately! I know what you think—that because of what I did for him at Laguna he decided to give up Shirley and took that way. But all he had to do was walk out on her, without putting himself in disgrace."

"Let's talk to him," I suggested, and we started immediately to make a new speed record between McMullen and the flying field.

It did seem ridiculous. For what possible reason, short of sheer insanity, would a man brand himself a card-cheat? A man who'd do that would cut off his head to cure an earache. I couldn't make head nor tail of it, but I was exuding curiosity in corpulent chunks. I aimed to get at the bottom of things, and quickly.

WE FOUND him in his tent, alone, holding communion with a large bottle of *tequila*.

He stared at us, as we came in, and I'll swear his eyes brought me up short. There was suffering in them, and a sort of bewilderment. It changed the whole aspect of the man. It was his eyes that repelled one, ordinarily. Now that there was something human in them, the change was magical.

Penoch O'Reilly planted himself, as per usual, his mustache turned upward belligerently, and his eyes snapping.

"Regardless of anything else, Ralph, how the 'ell did you happen to cheat so clumsily? The cheating I can understand; the way it was done I can't."

Kennedy took a big drink, gave us one and, as he poured them, said sardonically:

"You give me credit for knowing better, then? You ought to."

"If you did it deliberately, why?" I broke in. "If you wanted to do what Penoch asked, and lay off the girl—"

"We both happened to be in love," he said calmly, as if laughing up his sleeve. His eyes, however, were averted.

"Huh?" snorted Penoch scathingly. "You in love?"

"For the first and only time in my life," Kennedy admitted casually, his back

toward us. "In fact, I'm so nuts about her that I couldn't let her in for what she'd be in for with me. Don't flatter yourself, Peewee. It wasn't for you I did it. It was for her."

"But why that way?" I barked.

"If I just broke off," he said, eying a new glass of *tequila* with narrowed eyes, "she'd have taken a long while to get over it. Might as well cut everything off clean, show her what I am all at once, and blackjack her into hating me. Make it easier all around."

For a moment his eyes met mine, and the mask was off. I don't get sentimental as a rule, but I was looking at a man whose whole life had come up to torture him, and who was going through an accumulation of suffering.

"By the way, Peewee, I'm resigning, of course, and leaving tomorrow on the five o'clock. Probably'll have to borrow some dough. I'd like to take a last ride, so keep things quiet until I get it, eh?"

Penoch nodded wordlessly. Cocky as he was ordinarily, and sure of himself, he was nonplussed now. Kennedy had turned into a strange species of animal to him, and he couldn't believe it.

"And now," grinned Kennedy, keeping up his bluff to the last, "will you two get the hell out of here and let a gentleman and a scholar get drunk in peace and quiet?"

"Don't want any company?" Penoch asked him, and there was real pleading in his tone.

For the first time in our acquaintance I saw actual softness in Kennedy's eyes, as he looked at the man he had liked and admired as much as it had been possible for him to feel those emotions for anybody.

"Nope. Let's shuck the past, eh what? What the hell? And I've got to do a little high-powered thinking. 'Night."

We walked thoughtfully out into the starlight. Then I made a profound remark.

"I've heard of the miracles that love is supposed to work, but this is the first one I've seen. I think the combination of you risking your life for him, and a real unselfish feeling for a girl, has sort of opened up a new world to Kennedy. He's got guts, hasn't he?"

"Never lacked those," boomed Penoch. "At that, you may be right. I guess he's always figured every hand was against him—and now that he's found out there's a little white in the world he doesn't know what to make of it. He proved himself, all right, tonight, but if he'd told me that this afternoon I'd have laughed as hard as I would over a romantic yarn about the honeymoon of a salmon."

"'Night. I don't feel much like talking."

To tell the truth, I didn't either. I wandered around the field, smoking a few reflective cigarets, and finally called up the sheriff. I told him the whole story, and he was satisfied that everything pointed to the fact that if he didn't make a move everything was all right. I figured it was better, and so did he, that Shirley should never know the inside. Consequently, the Currans were not called up, and have not had the real dope to this day.

I finally went to sleep, but in the morning I was, of course, still thinking about one Ralph Kennedy. And for some funny reason I wasn't sure of him—his sincerity, I mean. I was wondering whether there wasn't some trick connected with his gesture of the night before. However, I thought it best, at breakfast—to which meal he did not lend his presence—to tell the boys the entire yarn, simply to offset the gossip that would run wild around McMullen. Mr. Curran, of course, would eventually spill the beans, and I wanted the gang to speak up, knowing the facts, and say whatever they deemed best. Furthermore, I had a funny idea that when Kennedy left, I didn't want him to go in disgrace.

As the day wore on, I came to think more and more of this last flight stuff. All flyers are more or less superstitious about that. As a matter of fact, there have been a few, from Hobey Baker

down, who've met their Waterloo on the last hop before they kissed the Air Service good-by. I had a sort of premonition that it shouldn't be taken.

Consequently, when Kennedy ate bacon and eggs at lunch, with his eyes red, a hang-over sticking out all over him, I said:

"Listen, big boy, you've said you were leaving tonight and likewise that you were going to take a last jazz flight. You were drunk as a hoot owl last night, and I don't think you'll be in such good shape to fly this afternoon. Why not douse the idea of a hop?"

"Maybe you've got a good idea there," he said with a grin that didn't change the suffering eyes. "In fact, it's probably the good old logic. Say, Peewee, how about you taking me for a ride, so nothing'll happen?"

"Sure. I'll go with you."

I just happened to switch my gaze from one to the other, and I saw something. There were many experiences that they had gone through together in the past, which, naturally, had generated a certain feeling between them. But now each of them had discerned something in the other that transcended anything that they had previously known.

In short, I saw a man's affection for another man shining from each pair of eyes.

The rest of the gang, knowing the entire situation, chimed in with a lot of Air Service kidding, about that last ride, as for instance, Sleepy Spears' remark:

"Any hop is foolish, and a last one is suicide. You've made it sure death by letting Penoch fly you."

"In fact," Tex MacDowell chimed in, in his soft southern drawl, "I've had a shovel all ready to pick Penoch up with, for a long time. I'd pick a hang-over in preference to Penoch any time."

I guess nobody outside of the men who fly understand what air kidding is. Probably I don't myself. But in my dumb way I think that it's like a kid's whistling when he passes a graveyard, or, perhaps, laughing at the worst that could happen, so that, when it does happen, it won't mean anything.

WHEN lunch was over, and we were all drifting out of the mess-hall, I suddenly realized that I would like to share, a little bit, those last hours. I'd been so close to the thing that I wanted to hang around the outskirts of it, until Kennedy left. In other words, I was sentimental, and I thought quite a lot of Penoch, at that. So I said casually—

"I think I'll take a little private hop for myself when you do—a sort of chaser for the poker game, eh?"

Kennedy, I think, bewildered as he was at the world that had been opened to him so recently, appreciated the impulse behind my suggestion.

"Sort of be my guard of honor, eh?" he said. But those cold eyes were soft. "In fact, we'll be glad to have company, won't we Peewee?"

And so it happened that a half-hour later the three of us were on the line. Our two ships were being warmed up, and the mechanics, satisfied, had brought them down to idling.

"I'll sit in the back seat, big boy," Penoch told Kennedy, "but don't think that I won't take the stick away from you any time!"

You know, of course, that De Havilands are dual-control ships, but all the instruments are in the front cockpit, and that, in a manner of speaking, is the driver's seat.

I got into my own plane and, as I taxied out for the take-off, I couldn't exactly analyze my reason for being there. I guess it was a sort of vague tribute to Kennedy, and yet I had a funny feeling that something might happen—so much so that as I turned the motor full on and pushed the stick forward I was so absent-minded that I nearly broke the propeller, because I had the nose of the plane down so far.

Kennedy and Penoch had taken off first, and I just followed them as they circled the field for altitude. When we got to the tremendous height of fifteen

hundred feet, Kennedy, who was doing the piloting, started due west for Laredo.

I'll swear that we were not a thousand yards from the airdrome when it happened. I was flying possibly a hundred yards back of them, and almost the same distance to the right. All of a sudden I saw their ship go into a dive.

That meant something. When Kennedy started turning back toward the field I knew that the motor had cut out. Then, as I noticed the propeller, I knew that the motor had not only cut out, but had cut dead. The stick was revolving slower and slower. There was no motor power behind it.

The next second their ship was blanketed in fire. The motor was a mass of blue flame. Kennedy had not cocked the ship up into a side-slip soon enough. That blows the flames upward, away from the pilot. The left wing was afire before he started slipping, and that second of backward draught, because they were in a dive when the fire started, had caused the fuselage to catch fire in a dozen places.

My body and brain were numb. Even so, I subconsciously knew what had happened. The gas line had broken, and the gas, sprayed over the hot motor, had ignited.

They had gone into the slip—too late—before I started toward them. I was diving my ship, motor full on. There was nothing I could do—Penoch and Kennedy burned to death before my eyes—I was just getting nearer for no reason.

I suppose that it registered on me at the time, because I remember it so vividly now. Penoch told me what was said. Anyway, I saw Kennedy, bearing the brunt of the fire in the front cockpit, turn and gesture. He was talking. I could see through the smoke and fire his lips moving. Penoch told me that what he said was:

"Get out on the wing! I'm not leaving the ship— Let me jump! If Slim sees you, he'll get close. God! I can't last long! It'll just be two instead of one—"

What I saw was Penoch getting out of the back cockpit, hanging by his hands from the cowling. He hauled himself along the side of the ship, his feet dangling over space. His head was turned backward, to protect his eyes, and his clothing was charring, because he was out where the air-stream could reach him, and no flame could get a real start. But Kennedy, in the cockpit—

I was going through the most horrible nightmare that can be conceived. And yet, I instinctively sensed the possibility of saving Penoch, as he reached the right wing and started crawling along it.

Then Ralph brought the burning ship level; that blew the fire right back on him. I was close, and for that horrible minute I guess I ceased to think of my own safety. I knew that there was one desperate chance to save one of the two, and Penoch, of course, was the one, because Kennedy had willed it so.

Penoch was out of the fire now, at the edge of the right wing. He was hanging from the edge of it by his hands as I flew my ship up into position, my left wing underneath the other's right one. And Kennedy—I don't know by what transcendent power he was able to do it, as he burned to death—kept his ship level. Penoch dropped—his only chance for life—and he landed on my left wing. He grabbed the cabane strut, the little metal horn at the edge of the wing to which the control wires for the ailerons are attached, and passed out.

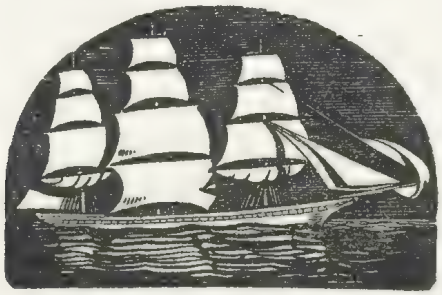
An instant later, Kennedy, a human bonfire, leaped from his burning ship. He fell out—blessed surcease from pain. And the ship, like a flaming coffin, seemed to follow his body down.

Penoch eventually got back into the rear cockpit, of course, and we're both here to tell the tale.

Sometime I hope that a burning ship will cease to trace a crimson path across my dreams. Probably it won't.

Anyway, if Ralph is a spook in some spiritual village, teaching the Twelve Apostles how to play poker, I hope he has time to tip his halo in acknowledgment of the salute of Slim Evans to a crook and a hero, a scoundrel and a man.

ASK *Adventure*



For *free information* and *services* you can't get elsewhere

The Princess Pat's

THE FIRST Canadian unit in the lines —and among the bravest of the brave in the whole War.

Request:—"Will you kindly give me some information regarding the 'Princess Pat's' of Canada?

When were they organized?

Did they go to France at the start of the War (1914)?

What important battles were they in?

Who was their commanding officer?"—FRANK L. YOUNG, Maxwell, Cal.

Reply, by Lieutenant Glen R. Townsend:—The First Canadian Light Infantry regiment, popularly known as the Princess Pat's, because sponsored by Princess Patricia, was organized immediately after the outbreak of the World War. On August 23, 1914, at Ottawa, Princess Patricia presented the newly formed battalion with colors worked by her own hands, and less than two months afterward, on October 3, the regiment sailed from Gaspé Bay, Quebec, together with other units making up the First Canadian Division. Landing in England about two weeks later, the Division went into camp on Salisbury Plain.

The Princess Pat's battalion consisted almost entirely of trained soldiers, men who had seen service in South Africa and elsewhere and men who had been on the reserve list of the Canadian army. It was therefore drawn for duty at the front ahead of other units of the First Canadian Division and was sent to France in December, 1914, where it joined the 27th British Division. The Princess Pat's were thus the first Canadian unit to appear in the lines and in fact the first overseas troops to fight beside the British in any important engagement of the World War.

The first fighting in which the Canadians participated were the battles about Ypres in the early spring of 1915, the Princess Pat's entering the line near St. Eloi. From the very beginning the regiment built up a reputation for steadiness under fire. Colonel Francis Farquhar, who had brought the regiment from Canada, was killed on March 20. Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Buller who succeeded him lost an eye on May 5.

ON MAY 7 the Pat's experienced perhaps their worst day of the war. There were 635 names on the roll of the battalion when the Germans attacked at dawn. Major Gault on whom the command had devolved, was killed early in the forenoon. Lieutenant Nevin was then the senior officer uninjured and he assumed command.

Time and again the Canadians hurled the attacking Germans back from their lines only to have to withstand attacks from fresh enemy troops. There was no relief and no reinforcements for the Canadians. At noon only four officers were alive and unwounded. But the survivors of all ranks held to their position with a grim determination and checked each enemy advance. At 10 P.M. when the Princess Pat's were finally withdrawn only 150 men of the morning's strength of 635 answered to their names.

It is impossible in this letter to follow the Princess Pat's throughout the war. As with the other Canadian units, their ranks were filled from time to time by fresh drafts from Canada, and they participated in the entire struggle. Late in 1915 they were united with the Canadian Corps and served with it in the First British Army. General Sir Julian Byng commanded the Canadian Corps. The battles of the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Arras are some of the more important engagements in which the Pat's took a distinguished part. For further details consult: "The Canadians in France" by Capt. Harwood Steele; "Canada in Flanders" by Lord Beaverbrook and Major Charles G. D. Roberts; and "First Canadians in France" by F. McKelvy Bell.

Army Cooks

SHADES of Delmonico and the old Hauf-brau Haus! Glance at these menus and then agree with us that the humble Army chow-man is a much maligned creature.

Request:—"Would you give me information about the duties of an Army cook, bill of fare for one week and how many men and officers to cook for? Also anything else I would have to know to make a real cook? I would also want to know where I can get drill regulations. I am a 1st class private in the 138th National Guard and have been second cook during the late war, in the transport service."

—H. MORET, St. Louis County, Mo.

Reply, by Lieut. Glen R. Townsend:—To make good as a cook in the Army a man needs about the same qualifications as he would to be a satisfactory cook in a first class boarding house in civil life. However, I think that his work as an Army cook would be more pleasant and interesting and a man who has the ability and is willing to learn can get all his training in the Army. The old maxim that "an army travels on its stomach" is true both in peace and war and in every section of the United States and in our foreign garrisons the Army maintains splendid schools for the proper training of cooks, bakers and mess sergeants.

In the Army an average organization (company, troop or battery, depending on whether it is infantry, cavalry or artillery) of say, seventy-five men, will have two cooks and two assistant cooks and one mess sergeant. One cook and one assistant cook will be on duty each day, thus giving them a day off every other day for rest and recreation. Cooks may be either privates or privates first class, and they also receive extra or "specialist" pay. In garrison each organization has its own kitchen well equipped with cooking utensils and which is always kept spic and span. In the field the cooking is done either with the field rolling-kitchen upon which meals are prepared while the troops are on the march, or with field ranges.

There is not much fancy cooking in the Army, but food has to be prepared so that it is clean, appetizing and wholesome. And there is always plenty of it. I am enclosing some menus of meals which were actually served in one of our companies here at Fort Snelling within the last few days. These will give you a fair idea of what Army meals are like. There is always a demand for good cooks and if you can qualify you will have no trouble finding a place for your services.

MENUS
COMPANY "H" THIRD INFANTRY
Fort Snelling, Minn.

June 11, 1927

SUPPER
Hamburger Steak
Brown Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Ice Cold Buttermilk
Bananas
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

BREAKFAST
Baked Beef Hash
Medium Boiled Eggs
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

DINNER
Soft Roast Loin of Beef
Mashed Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Radishes
Ice Cold Lemonade
Fig Nutons
Bread

Mess Sgt
Corby
Cook
Zastoupil

June 12, 1927

SUPPER
Breaded Beef Stew
English Potatoes
Cold Tomatoes
California Peaches
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

BREAKFAST
Fried Eggs
Hashed Fried Potatoes
French Toast
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

DINNER
Fried tendered Steak
Mashed Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Stewed sweet Corn
Peach Pudding
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

J. A. BOYERS
Captain, 3rd Infantry,
Commanding

June 13, 1927

SUPPER
Cold Sliced Roast Pork
Cold Sliced Liver Sausage
Brown potatoes
Cake
Brown Gravy
Radishes
Apple sauce
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

BREAKFAST
Oatmeal and milk
Fried eggs
Fried Potatoes
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

DINNER
Boiled Ham
Boiled Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Lettuce Salad
Radishes
Rhubarb Sauce
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

June 14, 1927

SUPPER
Beef Stew Pot Pie
Spaghetti and Tomato
Lettuce salad
Light Rolls and Butter
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

BREAKFAST
Oatmeal and milk
Fried Bacon and eggs
Soft Toast and butter
Coffee, milk and sugar
Bread

DINNER
Fried Beef Steak
Mashed Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Peas, creamed
Lettuce Salad
Short Cake
Coffee, milk and sugar
Parkerhouse rolls and butter

J. A. BOYERS.
Captain 3rd Infantry
Commanding

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 5742 Stony Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Yachting BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash., or HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 16th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 423 Wilson Ave., Columbus, O.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M.D., Falls City, Neb.

Camp Cooking HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions on investment excluded.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 2200 Kinzie Ave., Racine, Wis.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, Fleet Marine Corps Reserves, Box 1042, Madford, Oregon.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, No. 2 Grace Court, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley)," care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Ornithology PROF. ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE, Mercersburg Academy, Mercersburg, Pa.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey or SIGISMUND BLUMANN, Claus Spreckels Bldg., San Francisco, Calif.

Linguistics and Ethnology (*a*) *Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology.* (*b*) *Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies).* (*c*) *Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next two sections.)—BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 330-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean* (*Siberian Waters*).—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

✠**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.* CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China, and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and O. E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

Cuba and West Indies *Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, 236 Fox Ave., San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Also Indian life and habits: Hudson's Bay Co. posts. No questions answered on trapping for profit.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), Box 393, Ottawa, Canada.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, Long Island.

Alaska. Also mountain work.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1427 Lareta Terrace, Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.*—E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.* Also Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance.—F. H. ROBINSON, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo.*—FRANK EARNEST, Sugar Loaf, Colo.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, 1029 Litch Court, Reno, Nev.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Especially wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Minn., and Lake Michigan.* Also clamming, natural history, legends.—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River.* Also routes, connections, itineraries; river-steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions about working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears.—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Lower Mississippi River. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Middle Western U. S. Part 6 *Great Lakes.* Also seamanship, navigation, courses, distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties, river navigation.—H. C. GARDNER, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Eastern Maine. For all territory east of the Penobscot River.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Western Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Adirondacks, New York.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Maryland and District of Columbia.* Also historical places.—LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 1505 C St. S. E., Washington, D. C.

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard.* Also sawmilling, saws.—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)
(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

Grub Pile

BEING a rather large critter myself—with an appetite which every now and then threatens to turn me into a human blimp—the subject of food always has held a peculiar fascination. Understand me, I don't mean just bannock, bacon and beans in the mass—although many a mass of 'em I've enjoyed.

Food is a darned romantic subject; I can get a bigger kick out of venturing into Papa Antoine's in New Orleans, giving the waiter *carte blanche*, and dining on strange, delicious dishes I have never met before, than most men get out of their first high dives, or the first time they kiss a widow. The first time I encountered caviar, these great big Russian fellows about like No. 2 buckshot were served to me in a crystal bowl chipped out of a block of ice. Mm! Since that time—usually after earnest scanning of the state of the exchequer—on infrequent occasions, I have ordered caviar. But the results have been just a trifle disappointing. I'm sure it was the glamor of the unknown; a mild adventure thrill to be discovered even in this most ordinary of human pastimes.

But how much more fortunate must have been scores of men who will read these lines—those cheerful galoots who grinned and took a chance at the native dishes at Pernambuco, Port Said, Macao, Lahore!

I'd like nothing better than to hear from them; have them tell all of us around the Camp-Fire just in what land and under what circumstances each man enjoyed his finest, most spectacular meal. Was it figs, honey and Arab coffee at Biskra? Or *bouillabaisse* at Marseilles? Or what? Complete menus will be welcomed—and beverages, the natural accompaniments of courses in many civilized lands, should be listed. It just might come about that in the course of time these experiences might fill an absorbingly interesting volume—"A Gourmet On The Adventure Trail," let us say.

J. D. Newsom

IT IS pleasant news that this talented author, soon to have his first novel published, also has one of his *Adventure* Magazine short stories included in "Best War Stories" brought out by Small, Maynard this fall.

A number of Newsom's popular tales of the French Foreign Legion will appear in coming issues of *Adventure*. The first, a novelette, is scheduled in our December fifteenth issue.

Throwing Lead and Steel

THE FOLLOWING letter from an old-timer of the West, who has been both crack shot and gunsmith, offers some tips for those who like to experiment with weapons.

I am getting to be an "Old Boy"—nearly 52—but strange as it may seem to a lot of younger men the Old West really went out before I came in. There have been a few isolated hangovers, but the fact remains that my father who was a scout and a friend and a companion of Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, Doctor Bogardus and others, quit because things had got tame before I was born.

My first gun was a Flobert .22 short; then came a Quakenbos; later, a Stevens. I could hit anything I could see, within the range of the small guns. There was no money in the ranch we owned, so father traded it for a hardware stock, and moved it to Spencer in 1887. I was chief salesman of sporting goods and learned to repair guns and other articles.

I have handled guns considerably since. Though I don't know much about them, I have learned a few things. To the fellows who have been arguing over small points I have this to say: Guns and knives and such things are in some respects like religion or politics. You can just argue and argue but you don't get anywhere, because there are so many men, and they handle the guns differently, and all get good results in different ways. Honestly, I got so I could shoot a .22 just as well upside down or with a looking glass, or right—or left-handed—just a matter of practise; that's all.

Now about single action and double action revolvers. Practise will make a natural shot good with any of them; and that goes with automatics or any kind of a gun that has a true bore.

In my opinion and speaking from my experience both as a user of guns and a repairer of guns, the Colt single action "punch-out" was and still is the most reliable gun ever made. I have one of very ancient vintage with three notches that were made over thirty years ago, that has been shot thousands of times and is still in good order, has never been repaired, and I think will stand up another lifetime.

My son has a Colt .32 swing-out; it is a relatively poor gun, in my opinion. He has also a new .38 swing-out Smith and Wesson. We had it out the other day; and while it is quite accurate it jammed after some fifty shots. The double action feature for target shooting is, I think, very poor; for the life of me I just can not use the trigger to pull the hammer back and keep from shooting to one side. By cocking it I managed to put a full round into a pint can set up at thirty paces; and my son did it too.

I had my old .45 single action Colt and an automatic with me down in Florida. I traded off the automatic. I don't want to see *how many times* I can shoot but *how few times I have to shoot;* and about once for the old .45 will do the necessary. Yes, you can pull the hammer back as you draw and the place to carry your gun to get quick action is the handiest place for *you.* Try it in various ways. You will soon be able to decide which is best. Then practise from that place.

One thing I have observed. The side break Colt and the foreign copies of it have a very bad defect. I was looking at a big drawer full of second-hand revolvers in a pawnshop not long ago. They had over fifty of this style on hand, and every one of them had loose cylinders. I mean that the little dog that is supposed to hold the cylinder in line with the barrel was worn so the cylinders would play about an eighth of an inch when the guns were cocked. They had but two old single actions, and both were solid as though of one piece. I think that that defect in the side break model accounts for a lot of poor shooting.

To the doubting Thomases I wish to say that for very short ranges it is a fact that the very finest accuracy with a revolver can be easily developed without actual sighting—some call it "hip shooting". It doesn't matter if the weapon is held at the hip or some other position, but learn to catch the nearby mark with the eye; and if you don't try guiding the gun too much you will hit a very small object just as you do a nail with a hammer. I cannot recommend this for distances of more than five yards, however.

When my sons were small I bought them a little spring pistol that shot a wooden slug, and showed them how to hip shoot. In about five minutes they had a top spinning on the table and were standing at the wall and hitting it almost every shot.

Now our knife throwing friend—a word to you! I know you and your friends are having lots of fun. I have tried the same thing, and it's fine sport, and does get one. I don't doubt your claims at all. But here is something to think about. First, the knives one buys are not intended for throwing at all. It is hard on them, and difficult to throw them. Try this. Have your blacksmith make you some knives from old horse rasps. Make the blades about eight inches or even longer, with heavy points, leaving the points thick for two inches. Sharpen on both edges; then the rest of the blade make as thin as an ordinary butcher knife, and extend it for the handle, making two or three holes for rivets; and for a handle or haft make two flat pieces of very light wood such as willow. The whole knife should be equal in weight on both sides from end to end. Now try this. In place of taking hold of the point and making it turn over in the air (a thing as you say difficult to control at various distances) just grasp the back of the handle and blade lightly in the palm and extended fingers, holding it from falling with a light pinching of your thumb (you can even let the haft lie along your wrist) then swing your arm back over your head and throw overhanded, letting the knife go when your hand has descended to the level you require to make the distance you want. The knife does not have to turn over, but shoots out point first, and goes through the air like an arrow. I think you will get more distance, more penetration and greater accuracy; and best of all there is no trouble about the distance—whether three feet or thirty is all the same, you see. This was shown me by an old Indian by name of Longes who lived on the bank of Lake Tewaukan in the Sisseton Reservation in the part that extended into Sargent County, North Dakota, some thirty years ago.—EUGENE STEBBINGS.

Fryin' Onions

MANY a night around the Camp-Fire's glow the name of Shanghai Charlie comes up. Voices unconsciously

grow quieter, softer in tone. He was a man, and we miss him.

MEMORIES

Here I'm sittin' in a buildin',
Top o' which is near sky high,
Lookin' out upon a river,
Watchin' ships go sailin' by.

Lots o' work is all around me,
Things what need attention too;
Yet I'd jack them up tomorrow,
Just to be one o' their crew.

Comes to anchor ten destroyers,
Hear them mud hooks rattle down;
Lord it brings a recollection,
Just to hear that pleasant sound.

Time was then I wasn't solemn,
Wore a suit o' Navy Blue,
When I looks out at them babies,
Kinda wish I was back, too.

Smell o' onions slowly fryin',
Java pot a-shinin' bright,
Blowers hummin' and a purrin',
Memories o' a tropic night.

What's that quartermaster sayin'?
See them flags wave to an' fro,
Makin' date with Shanghai Charlie,
For to see a pitcher show.

Shanghai Charlie, see he answers,
Says he's got another date,
Goin' down to Philadelphia,
Cause he's got a "48".

Bosun's pipes, you hear that whistle?
Liberty's at one o'clock,
Watch them sailors hit the gangway;
See them scurry up the dock.

Parakeets they've brought from Rio,
Silks and satins from bazaars,
An' if they stopped in at Cuba,
Bet they got some good cigars.

Yes, if things bust out in China,
Or in any other clime.
I'll get me a leave of absence,
Ain't too old to haul a line.

And Shanghai Charlie was a real person, a crack signalman of the Navy. He was an old shipmate of mine, and he was also your own Charles Victor Fischer, who wrote us those fine and real stories of the Navy; who knew his stuff and could talk like a real sailorman of the fleet. There is no man today writing for any magazine, that can equal or come near him in attempting such a thing. May he, and his good ship *Rollin' Lou* cruise home to the reward he well deserves. I understand his name is on the tablet in your office.—JIM BURKE

Itchy Too

PROBABLY every chechako has fallen for this. The North is plagued with flies; and a good many of them, from chewing on Kodiak bear, bull moose, Dogrib Indian and similar tough morsels, have a ferocity and efficiency of attack greater by far, in proportion to size, than that of the barracuda or Bengal tiger.

The irritated chechako, stung on the nose just as he lines the sights of his Savage on a mountain goat, lets out a yelp and a hearty curse. Then:

"How in *hell* many kinds of flies you got in this species-of-a-backyard-telephone-booth kind of country?"

The guide comes alive; he has been waiting for this. But he seems to take the question seriously.

"Well, lessee," he cogitates slowly. "First they's the black flies, an' 'en come the deer flies. Next is the greenheads, an' 'en the bear flies. The house flies an' sand flies arrive jess about the same time. An' 'en—"

He pauses dramatically.

Slap! Another sextette of carnivorous flies die on the chechako's chin.

"Well, dammit, what then?" he snaps.

The guide shakes his head. "The snow flies!" he retorts with graveyard glee.

I REALLY wonder what district or country of the world owns the most vicious, deadly or tormenting insect pests? And what are they like? Are they the man-eating *motucas* of the Amazon, which settle in huge swarms upon a victim, leaving only cleaned bones after a few minutes; the terrible tsetse fly of Africa; the fire ants of Mexico; or the lowly "red bugs" of our own Gulf Coast?

From far off Abyssinia, Gordon MacCreagh writes of an experience with one such unpleasant insect customer.

A new item is that both my wife and I, owing to outstripping our caravan and having to sleep in an

awful Gala hut, have contracted a thing called *chorrasau*, which is a bug related to *pediculosus scabiei*, only much more virulent. They burrow under the skin and pretend they're rabbits. One begins to find out about them about a month later, after they have laid out a complete warren with potpoles and connecting passages throughout the system. And they don't come out eventually like chiggers, either; they trench in like an army of occupation; and if not blasted out they develop ulcers—and the victim's fingers and toes drop off. One scratches oneself with nails and broken glass, sandpaper and such: but that isn't the real remedy. The cure is to smear one's entire body daily with an ointment containing gritty sulphur and kindred smelly penetrating medicaments. For ten days without washing—till one goes about giving off an odor of sulphuretted hydrogen. This is well as a warning, because the damn' things are so transferable that one can hand a few out to one's dearest enemy just by shaking moist hands. After ten days one may wash and see whether one has got rid of them; and if not, ten more days.

God gave me this to help out the monotony of lying in bed with fever.—GORDON MACCREAGH, *Adventure's* Abyssinian Expedition, Addis Abbeba.

A Weapon of the Woods

THE following letter interested me particularly, since I have followed a pair of setters—hunting turkey and quail—over "mo'n a coupla quahtahs" of these swamps, and of the Cajan woods directly west and south. But I imagine I did better with a double-barreled Parker than would have been probable with a blowgun . . .

Your Camp-Fire symposiums have contained several mentions of blowguns in recent issues. I have been waiting in vain for some correspondent in the Gulf States to tell you about that near-lethal weapon. As no one has done so and you invite further discussion, permit me to participate.

I know nothing of its origin, where or how it was used in the dim distant years, or what the Indians were doing with it when Columbus arrived. But I do know that when I was a boy in central Alabama all of us had one. The kid who didn't own a blowgun from the time he was five years of age until he was allowed to go forth with a single barrel, muzzle loading shotgun, a highly polished, home made powder horn and a leather shot pouch swinging from his shoulders, a box of "G. D." percussion caps in his packet, was really not in the picture of boy sports.

A remnant of the Choctaw tribe lived somewhere thereabouts; probably in the dense forests of the Tombigbee or Black Warrior swamps. Every autumn they visited the white man's haunts, plantations and villages, selling blowguns and baskets, the latter of every size and shape, beautiful workmanship. Both were made from cane, a growth similar to bamboo, but of less circumference. Though I confess ignorance on this point, I hazard the statement that they are of the same species, modified by environment, climate and so forth. The word "canebrake," in common use in that section, takes its name from that plant. In the low, water soaked lands of the "black belt" (soil, not niggers) the stalks grow so close together that cattle can not penetrate it. These canes constituted the only fishing rods that we boys of that day and locality ever saw, and are still sold in sporting goods stores wherever I have been on this continent, under the name of bamboos.

As all doubtless know, cane grows in hollow joints, eight to twelve or fourteen inches in length; the stalk itself as many or more feet in height. For blowguns the Indians burn out the joints with red-hot iron rods, and make the inside as smooth and straight as that of a gun barrel. The guns were from five to eight feet long, and less than an inch in diameter. How the job was accomplished was then and still is a mystery to the writer, considering the crude tools employed. On the outside always there were imprints as of the teeth; and we youngsters believed that the Indians used their teeth in straightening the cane and possibly that was the *modus operandi*. Of the hundreds of blowguns I have seen and dozen or more owned, I don't remember one that ever warped from a mathematically straight line. Warping, of course, would destroy its accuracy as a shooter.

And they were remarkably accurate, too, in skilled hands at short distances. There was no way of taking aim with one eye closed. Accuracy was acquired by use of the same sense employed by one who shoots from the hip, or by the billiard player. If I remember correctly, it was no trick at all to send an arrow a hundred yards or more with the breath, doubtless the first use of compressed air force. Birds could be killed at a distance of thirty or forty feet from the mouth, and much farther if a scratch hit was made. Occasionally, under favorable conditions, a squirrel would be bagged. The impression prevailed that Indians could do much better; that we were mere tyros. I never saw an exhibition of an Indian's marksmanship.

The arrows, twelve to fifteen inches long, were of two kinds, one made from the cane, the other from steel knitting needles. They were feathered with cotton, at the other end from the sharp point, three or four inches deep. The cotton was attached with a thread, wrapped tightly around the roughened stem, every thread covered by the next wisp of cotton. Cane arrows cost five cents; needles ten. Blowguns sold for from twenty-five cents up to as high as six bits, depending largely upon length and finish.

The Indians were suspicious of the fractional paper currency then in use, called "shinplasters", in denominations of five, ten, twenty-five and fifty cents. They preferred trade, coffee, sugar, old clothes and trinkets. If you could get hold of a gold or silver coin, you could skin those Choctaws proper.

My personal knowledge concerning blowguns was confined to the 'seventies. When I left the South in 1880 they were still in use; but slingshots were gaining in favor. Returning a dozen or fifteen years later, I found that the boys knew nothing of them. Diligent search and inquiry failed to find even one, and I am wondering still what became of the thousands in use relatively so short a while before.—J. W. CONNELLA, Senator Hotel, Reno, Nevada.

The Treasure of Lafitte

I CERTAINLY am glad to publish readers' letters which bear upon any fork of the Adventure Trail. Unfortunately, Mr. Haughton's previous letter seems to have gone astray. I shall be glad to hear again from him, and from others who may have information in respect to this subject.

About ten or twelve months ago I wrote "Camp-Fire" in *Adventure* Magazine, in reference to Lafitte's treasure that was supposed to have been buried down on the Texas Coast. At the time I wrote I mentioned the fact that I and several others spent two weeks looking for it. We used an electrical device which was absolutely reliable and worked on scientific principles. However, I'll state, we did not have any luck. What I wrote Camp-Fire about was to find out if any of the readers knew any more about this treasure. But I failed to see my letter in print and I haven't missed a copy of your magazine in ten years. I like your magazine just fine, but feel that you should publish a letter once in a while, especially from an old subscriber. I will appreciate it very much if you will advise me about this. I believe your readers would be glad of an opportunity to hear of our experiences. Please let me hear from you.—WILL G. HAUGHTON, 1913 Woodhead Street, Houston, Texas.

Was There Ever a Cockney?

JUST as brewers always seem to be German, laundrymen Chinese, rug-makers Armenian, watchmakers Swiss, and fruit peddlers Greek, the engineers—of fiction, at least—appear to hail from the land of the thistle and the (vocal) bur. We are glad to ask the question with you, Lieutenant. Perhaps from some far distant port we'll hear from a man with a spanner, who claims Sicily or Vanua Levu as his birthplace.

I have just been reading a sea story that brings to mind a question that I have meant to ask for a long time. This is it. Why is it that nearly all writers of sea stories seem to imagine that all marine engineers are Scotchmen? I have known a great many who were not of that nationality. There were some Scots, of course, but by no means all. I have put in over six years in the merchant service, on quite a number of different ships.—F. V. GREENE, Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.

Tournament and Sport

SPEED, penetration and accuracy of arrows. Comrade True backs the bow against the rifle.

Perhaps I can throw a tallow-dip light on several spots.

Archer speed in hot action. Twelve shots per minute I do not think would have been excessive, in the one thousand years when the long-bow was the deadliest weapon known in England and the world in general. In the todays, visit any large tournament:—say, the National annual, at Soldier's Field, near Harvard College, and you will see some archers temperamentally lessening that time. I suspect that I average six seconds per shot; and I know I have to put the brake on against too fast shooting. In a "hot corner" I might easily get it down to four; perhaps a fraction less, if the arrows were free flowing from the quiver.

Penetration. That has already been thoroughly discussed in books. Summed up there is oak and oak! Now, an arrow carries its striking-power to a remarkable degree to the end of its flight. A bullet-shell-pointed arrow, weight one ounce, from a fifty- or fifty-five-pound bow would go half its length through a thick straw target at two hundred and forty yards; and in our club at shorter ranges we often have to tie two targets together after a few months of use. Now, a three-ounce arrow, driven by a war-bow of ninety or one hundred and ten pounds *plus* would drive through a double-thick chain-mail at short range (proved by Dr. Saxton Pope) and with a carrying range of over three hundred yards of potential deadliness would drill holes through your "two- or three-inch oak" at sixty yards less, if it was the average weather-beaten plank. Why, it seems but the other day when Art Young with a seventy-five-pound bow drove a three-ounce arrow with a *broad head* through a two hundred-pound running black bear! It went in at the flank, came out at the shoulder, and kept right on. So did the bear, by the way, for two hundred yards or so, then dropped dead. Who wouldn't? That was some run, as it was.

For some reasons beyond my control I wasn't born then, at the date referred to. Personally I'd surmise that there were stars in those days even as now; and that others shone somewhat by their reflected light. But, let's reason a bit. Given a husky man who from childhood was daily (in theory) practicing with a one-hundred-pound bow at three hundred yards. He should be as accurate

as our *occasional* modern archer with his lighter weapon and so lesser range, shooting only at odd times and holidays, and Will Compton killed a deer with a single arrow at one hundred and seventy-five yards!

About four years ago at a tournament, in one event, the mark was a two-inch ribbon pinned perpendicularly on a four-foot target one hundred yards away, four men to a target. Out of my four in the first round of six arrows one missed the ribbon, one pinned it to the lower black, the third made a dead-center gold, and the fourth pinned it to the upper blue:—but he also had an upper-red only an inch and a half away, and shot away the feather on the target-top one inch above the ribbon-end. All of them had other good hits on the target itself, which did not count.

Spurred up by several misses. I have seen one of our veterans drive three arrows in succession into the center of a target at sixty yards, and a five-cent-nickel would have covered the three holes in their triangle. I did that once myself! *Only*—the three had drifted about a foot to the left of the target-center.

If any of you ducks want to meet a good archer on *even terms*, just take off that graduated sight of yours, telescopic or otherwise, get the trajectory-flight of his arrow at, say, sixty yards, measure off the same trajectory-flight of your own pet rifle—and then shoot it out, *off-hand*, without a rest: and if you like, try it also in speed-plus-accuracy, drawing each cartridge from a thimble-belt. Let me pick my archer and I'll bet on him!

THERE aren't any tigers in Abyssinia! But, skipping that slip, just get Sir Samuel White Baker's book "Abyssinia," dated back in the late 50s or 60s, and you'll find a whole chapter on just such a hunt in which he was an active witness, vividly told and well-worth quoting. In brief, two hunters armed with straight, cross-handled swords, preferably three, however, would track down an elephant and drive him into the open. Their swords were bound with whipcord for some eight inches beyond the hilt, making it two-handed.

One man rode at the elephant's head and enticed it to a charge, keeping just far enough ahead to concentrate its attention. Like swooping falcons the other two dashed for his rear, one of them getting the chance to dismount at full speed and slash the rear leg above the heel, severing the tendons then sprinting away for his horse. That foot instantly would turn up like an old shoe, and if the 'phant chased, the other horseman instantly slashed the other leg—and presently that elephant went to sleep from loss of blood. Dangerous, sport! They had one accident. The head-rider's horse was caught by thorns—they were taken by surprise—he was thrown and stepped on, breaking his thigh. His mate flashed in and slashed the leg; then, fearing lest the beast turn and trample on his chum he instantly slashed the elephant's *other* leg!—and thereby saved his mate.—JOHN PRESTON TRUE.

Propaganda

A LETTER came to my desk this morning. It hit me a stunning smash between the eyes. I am not going to quote the correspondent's name, or give the letter in full—for part of the language would scorch wood pulp.

Writing from Cleveland, the critic says in part, "I note with anger and disgust that *Adventure* has sold out to the Armament Trust, and is joining its voice in the vile propaganda designed to bring about another war . . ."

After that came a blistering denunciation. It was not till the closing paragraph that I really discovered what all the shooting was about. *Adventure's* betrayal of humanity consisted in the undeniable fact that *it had printed some war stories!*

Well, right off let me deny once and for all that I, or either of my predecessors, has been bribed by the armament trust (if any), or by any one else. I personally can't even pretend nobility, either, because the truth is, no one ever has approached me with even a Romeo and Juliet perfecto . . .

Under some circumstances, human nature being what it is, wars can not be avoided. I wish they could. Yet why shut one's eyes to all history, even when working toward world peace and understanding?

Hundreds of thousands of American men found their life's greatest adventures on the gory fields of France. Do not their deeds, their tragedies, their glorious thrills, their humorous mishaps deserve sympathetic chronicling—in a magazine named and dedicated to adventure?

And then thinking of Nason, Newsom, Boyd and others who have written some of the finest recent war fiction, I wonder just where consolation and assistance for the "armament trust" came in? To me, the tenor of it all has been just the other way—expressed well by a bitter buck private who lost a foot in the St. Mihiel push:

"It was a hell of a fine war—for the guy who got my job!"—ANTHONY M. RUD.

The TRAIL Ahead

The next issue of ADVENTURE

Two *Complete Novelettes:*

The Road to Kandahar

By Harold Lamb

Of this the Pathan thieves were certain, that within the high citadel of Kandahar were rich silk pavilions and ivory and red leather, full wine-skins, endless camels and mules, and a thousand slaves. But on those battlements the Persian, Abbas the Great, also cast greedy eyes—he and his veteran mailed cavalry and his fierce Red Hats who would rather slay than plunder, and rather torture than slay.

Alias the Blackbird

By Joel Townsley Rogers

Heavy with two hundred and fifty pounds of minted gold, the *Gold Beetle* soared over the Ramapo Hills. A speck—at first like a fly, then decidedly like a blackbird—changed the seaplane's course under a rain of machine gun bullets. And Sergeant Cedar Rudd watched it all from the sunny bosom of Bitter Lake, waiting patiently to do a thing or two himself.

Beginning a New Novel by Hugh Pendexter

The Sun Chasers

With the western sun beckoning them on with promises of a golden morrow, the adventurers of every age have gone forth seeking, ever seeking. Of this sturdy tribe was Roscoe Strong and his son, who were carried along on the westward sweep into the dangerous Nebraska frontier. Yet theirs was not land hunger or gold fever but the eternal restlessness of the empire builders.

And—*Other Good Stories*

DOWN IN A DUGOUT, Dinger Dole and his private raiding party, by LEONARD H. NASON; THE DANCEHALL FISHERMAN, a story of the early days of the Puget Sound country, by JAMES STEVENS; THE HORSETHIEF RENDEZVOUS, the hanging committee buys a gun, by RAYMOND S. SPEARS; THE BELLS OF SAN JUAN, Whiskers Beck gets called as a bandit, by ALAN LEMAY; CODE, the story of a mystery ship, by L. PAUL; THE LIGHTS OF RIP SHIN BALD, how a mountain feud was settled, by HAPSBURG LIEBE; UNCLE NNG AND THE PALE BLUE DOG, Chinese cunning against Chinese brawn, by CARROLL K. MICHENER

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month

WATCH THE *YOUNGER CROWD* PICK THE WINNERS!

LOOK around you at the big game —and see the Fatima packages pop out! No gathering of the younger set, large or small, fails to extend this extraordinary record. Unquestionably, Fatima has pleased more smokers for more years than any other cigarette.

FATIMA

The most skillful blend in cigarette history

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Chorus: we want home-made candy!

Eager appetites clamor for this famous home-made candy that has satisfied the urgent palates of millions!

It's Oh Henry!—originally home-made and still made the home-made way. Oh Henry! is like home-folks —"diamond in the rough"—no frills or tinsel—but when that urge for real home-made candy is upon you just walk up to the nearest candy counter and say

Oh Henry!

And here's how to make IT

FUDGE CENTER: 1½ cups pure cane sugar; ½ teaspoon creamery butter; 1 cup rich, full cream milk; 1 cup corn syrup; white of one egg.

CARAMEL LAYER: 4 teaspoons creamery butter; 1¼ cups corn syrup; 3 cups rich, full cream milk; ¼ teaspoon salt.

PEANUT LAYER: 3 cups prime No. 1 Spanish whole nuts, roasted in oil (hulls removed).

CHOCOLATE COATING: Melt one pound pure milk chocolate.

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